

**Addressing the Attrition of the Emerging Adult  
Population in the Assemblies of God Churches  
in Sunway – Subang, Malaysia:  
Towards a Discipleship Process**

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a qualification at any tertiary education institution.



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Christopher C H Pak

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the attrition of emerging adults in Sunway – Subang, Malaysia was caused by rapid changes in the postmodern world, especially in the urban setting. It has led to a different perspective of religiosity, faith, practice and an erosion of Christian beliefs among them. To address this attrition, this dissertation proposes a discipling process that is wide and flexible that realigns how church is done, using e-media, reinforcing sacraments and practices, and integrating intergenerational involvement.

Their attrition in these AG churches is a reality. If left unattended, the pace of attrition will increase and impact the health and future of the church. This has prompted this research in four aspects. Firstly, there is a recurring pattern of attrition among them in the Assemblies of God churches in Sunway – Subang, Malaysia. Secondly, a desire to develop a discipleship approach to address the attrition in these churches. Thirdly, a deep concern for the well-being of our children and youth transiting into adulthood. Lastly, a personal quest and development as a Christian living in an ever-changing world.

This project employs a mixed method of qualitative approach. The instruments used were an online survey questionnaire, focus groups, semi-structured personal interview. It sought to understand why the emerging adults have chosen their respective decisions whether to stay or leave, measures that can be taken to address it, developing a biblical approach towards discipleship process to aid faith transmission, and ways in which they can theologically express their spirituality and faith in a post-modern world.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

George Santayana made an important point about progress. He says, “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness...and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (2005, Kindle Locations 3396-3397). It is with this in mind that this research aims for: to make headway, to progress forward on a matter close to the writer’s heart.

Much western research has revealed a disturbing trend of attrition among emerging adults. Applying the words of Santayana, if we are to progress from here in the church life and its purpose in relation to the emerging adults, then what lessons can we learn, or retain in a bid to make progress? While the trend has greatly impacted the Western part of the Christian constituent, it cannot be assumed that Asia is experiencing the similar situation. Pew research has revealed Asia remains widely religious.

This chapter gives the overall view of the nature and purpose of this research. The outline of this chapter deals with the nature of the project, a statement of the problem, and the purpose and significance of this project. Five research questions will set the tone for pursuit this research. The definition of important terms and delimitations of the scope of the research will help retain the focal point of the developing a discipleship approach to address the attrition of the emerging adult population between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine in the Assemblies of God churches (AG) in the Sunway – Subang environment. A review of this chapter summarizes the flow of the thoughts of this writer. It will aid the reader’s appreciation of this research on the emerging adults.

### **The Nature of the Project**

The area of focus falls under the ambit of pastoral ministry. Specifically, it focuses on Christian education and discipleship. This research aims at discovering the factors contributing to emerging adults leaving church in this postmodern, post-Christian environment. With this understanding, it hopes to develop a discipleship approach to

address the attrition of this segment in the AG of Malaysia churches in Sunway – Subang environment.

It is a study that employs mixed-method research both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The subject deals with the interpretation of *why* the emerging adults have chosen their respective decisions, not just on *what* is happening in our present church environment. With the hope of redefining and finding clarity through conversations from the past to the present, the church can adequately address the needs of the changing world, especially among the emerging adults.

The potential significance that could derive from this research is in understanding the phenomenon of the attrition of emerging adults from our AG churches in Malaysia in the urban setting. In researching a specific cross-section of the urban church of Sunway – Subang environment, it is hoped that we can learn *why* this is happening. In knowing the factors contributing to the issue, we can address it in a more informed manner than working with assumptions not yet substantiated. With this in mind, we can develop a discipleship approach towards this phenomenon.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

The background to this research stems from my observations over the last thirty years – the painful reality that many of my church friends are no longer in church. They were youth leaders, and not just ordinary members. They were the ones who inspired and challenged us in the faith. I was determined that as a pastor, I would not want or allow this to recur. Yet, I see this trend recurring as a pastor and it disturbs me. What is it that we are not doing *right*? What can we do better?

In trying to address this phenomenon, I want to honestly seek to understand *why* this is happening, an observation aptly described by Kara Powell’s *Sticky Faith* where she concluded “that 40 to 50 per cent of kids who graduate from a church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college” (2011, Location 127). Why doesn’t the faith of our youth stick when they transit into college or working life? When the faith of our youth doesn’t stick, what can we do to address it? I want to discover the reasons and factors contributing to this phenomenon with the hope of finding solutions to address it.

In seeking to understand this phenomenon, I discover that my personal perspective is changing with my on-going research. Joining the chorus of conversations taking place it will help us better address the needs of the emerging adults of our churches. This is crucial as the continuation and vibrancy of the present and future church depend of our ability to not only retain them but to empower them to lead the church forward. The church will not be able to renew itself if this segment of our constituent leaves, and continues to recur.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Project**

Three key concerns underline this research. Firstly, I am concerned for the wellbeing and development of the AG churches in urban setting of Malaysia. I was on a short break in London ten years ago. While I was there, a pastor friend took me on long hikes. Along the way, we visited a few churches that dated up to one thousand years old in tradition. The sadness I experienced was the notice placed at the exit of the church, seeking donation to upkeep and maintaining the church. The message stated that the church has few members and was unable financially to do so without the help of well-wishers. There are similarities in our AG churches. AG started with children and youth in the 60's. Those churches now have more senior adults in their congregations, with smaller segments of youth and emerging adults. The future of the churches hinges on our ability to disciple every generation represented in the church life. For constant renewal, there needs to be a healthy mix of young, youth, emerging adults, adults, and senior adults in the church constituency.

Secondly, I am also concerned with the wellbeing of our children and youth transiting into adulthood. The phase of emerging adulthood (between the age of eighteen and twenty-nine) is a period of tremendous change and volatile. Personal experience with my peers during my youth days and the past thirty years (1991 – 2020) as a pastor has prompted the urgency and need to address it. The commonality is that we continue to observe attrition among the emerging adults in our AG churches. What is causing it? What can we do about it? How should we respond in the light of what we are experiencing? If we fail to respond adequately or address the decline, we will have a big gap between the children and youth with the older adults. It will have cascading

impact on local church leadership development and succession, and on a larger scale, the district and national scenes.

Thirdly, my personal quest and development as a Christian. It was at the end of December 2019; an emerging adult had a heart-to-heart talk with me. He wanted to take a break from church for six months. He felt he wanted to address his personal struggle with his faith in Jesus. The positive was that he assured me that he would be back after that, hopefully more resolved and certain about his personal faith. My response to him surprised me – I was understanding and did not try to persuade him to change his mind. I was willing to give him that latitude to explore and discover. Deep in my heart, it seems I am breaking though I wish it were not happening. Yet, there was a quiet confidence within. I no longer approach this matter by *prescribing what he should do*. I was willing to hear him out, assure him I am reachable and seeking to understand.

An informed understanding of this issue will lead to a better appreciation of the matter at hand. Then, a better approach can be crafted rather than a one size fit all approach from a perceived universal problem facing the church. For instance, much of the literature reviewed is framed in Western context. It has been covered extensively, and researched based on much of American churches. A specific dissertation by Jameison (1998) dealt with Pentecostal / Charismatic churches in New Zealand. He posited that attrition in the Western context resulted in emerging adults leaving the church, seeking newer expression of a Christian faith beyond the institutional church, a churchless faith, or abandoning the faith altogether. Pew 2018 research indicated that increasingly, the young adults are significantly less religious, and less aligned to Christianity.

For the Asians, only two Asian countries, South Korea and Japan, reflected the Western trend. They are significantly developed nations. The rest of Asia shows no significant contrasts. But increasingly, the young adults are significantly less likely to be affiliated with a religious group. The Asian experience is dissimilar in terms of the extent of the problem. Nevertheless, this trend is catching up as Asia becomes more urbanized, with youth migration to urban settings.

There are gaps this research can address. Firstly, very few researches are written on the emerging adults leaving church. A few Asian authors like Ajith Fernando and Edmund Chan have written on discipleship, but not specifically addressing the issue of attrition.

Fernando's personal experience of faith impartation through his mother impacts his idea of discipleship "as an affectionate relationship of caring between people who see themselves as having a parent – child relationship" (2019, Location 362). He emphasized that while "many see discipling primarily as one individual taking care of another individual...that is not the biblical model. In the Bible, Christians grow in community" (Location 962).

Chan stressed, "the greatest need of this generation is the intentional development of biblically grounded, theologically sound and spiritually vital disciples of Christ" (2008, 170). In a later work, he reiterated that spiritual formation is "the work of God" which is "essentially an inner-life journey" to be accomplished through "a community process" (2011, 36). Their insights affirm the inter-connectedness of emerging adults' faith development and its importance. This research can be first of many to come. Secondly, an Asian – Malaysian response can narrow the gap since contextual dissimilarity between East and West is still there albeit narrowing.

Does it mean that we have to revamp discipleship approaches our churches, fellowship or denomination in the light of the changing world of today? What can the church do to address the attrition of the emerging adult population in the AG churches in Sunway – Subang environment? It is a desired outcome that an approach can be developed to address this matter at hand.

A survey on traditional and contemporary discipleship approaches will help shed some to light what is working and what needs modification or revamping in face of the postmodern, post-Christian world.

### **Project Layout**

A literature review on past and present conversations on this subject is dealt with in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will deal with the analytical framework of the project. Data collection on selected sample groups will be conducted and analyzed. The findings and results will be presented in chapter 4 and 5. The conclusion and implications will propose a way forward for possible implementation of an approach crafted for the specific geographical setting. Its application may be adaptable for a wider audience.

## **Research Questions**

My central research question is “How to address the attrition of the emerging adult population between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine in the Assemblies of God churches in the Sunway-Subang, Malaysia and to develop a discipleship process towards it?”

I have posited five research questions to derive and identify the factors or reasons for the phenomenon. The findings from these questions will be valuable to develop a discipleship approach for the AG church in Sunway – Subang context. The five sub-questions are:

- Sub-question 1:       What has shaped the world of emerging adults and their perception of the church, faith and God, and how it affects discipleship process of the church to address it?
  
- Sub-question 2:       How are the data obtained on the phenomenon in the AG church?
  
- Sub-question 3:       Why do emerging adults leave or remain in the church and the contributing factors?
  
- Sub-question 4:       How did the AG church address this in the past and how should the AG church respond?
  
- Sub-question 5:       What are the ingredients needed for a discipleship approach for emerging adults theologically express their spirituality and faith in a post-modern environment?

## **Definition of Important Terms**

The scope of this research is determined by the reference to specific terms used in this research. The terms that are unique to this research are:

- 1) Assemblies of God of Malaysia (AG), Central District Council of the Assemblies of God (CDC); 2) Youth, Emerging adult, young adult, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, Baby Boomers; and 3) Churchless faith, Nones, Emergent church.

Firstly, the *Assemblies of God of Malaysia* (AG) is by nature a *cooperative fellowship*. Affiliation to this fellowship is based on subscribing to the sixteen fundamental truths, an inherent requirement for all AG churches. We are not a denomination, and the General Council does not dictate the way a church is led so long as they adhere to the sixteen fundamentals. The *General Council* is constituted of the up-to-date credential holders (Christian Worker, Ministry Associate, Licensed and Ordained) and churches (member and associate). In this way, the respective churches are autonomous based on the *self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting principles*. While they are accountable to the respective districts, every church is responsible for itself. The *intervention clause* in our constitution on the powers of the EXCO:

Reserve the right to intervene in the affairs of, and provide the necessary executive oversight to, a Member in the event that it becomes apparent that the Member after having exhausted every possible effort to resolve the internal strife within a reasonable period continues to experience prolonged internal strife of a magnitude that brings the Member into public disrepute, and the EXCO deems it is beyond the ability of the said Member to resolve. (Article 8.2.18b)

This provision is not exercised unless the situation is grave. The Sunway – Subang churches fall within the jurisdiction of the *Central District Council* (CDC), which covers the Klang Valley region and the state of Selangor. Kuala Lumpur has been re-delineated to the *Kuala Lumpur Eastern District* (KLE).

Secondly, *youth* is limited to those in the range of thirteen and seventeen. *Emerging adults* are those in the developmental age between eighteen to twenty-nine (after adolescence but before adulthood) as first introduced by Arnett (2000, 469). This demographical group has been commonly referred to as the *young adults* also. The group of Christians that I am referring to in my experience covers youth from the period of the *Baby Boomers*, those born after World War Two between 1946 – 1964. *Gen X* are those who were born between 1965 – 1983, while the *Millennial* or the *Gen Y* is a reference to those who are born between 1984 to 1998. Those who are born between 1999 to 2015 are referred to as the *Gen Z*.

Thirdly, *churchless faith* is a term coined for those who left church, but not the faith. Their aversion is the church, not Christ. (Jameison 1998). They are also referred to as the *Dones* or *the dechurched* (Packard 2015). The *Nones* are the religiously unaffiliated people (Penner 2011). *The emergent church* describes the people who constituted it, not

the place. The emphasis is placed on the term *missional* which attempts to deconstruct the current idea of church to reflect the Acts model.

### **Ministry Contexts for Observing the Phenomenon**

This research is based on the environment of Sunway – Subang AG churches, focusing on the English-speaking congregations. Selangor was the first state to be identified as a developed state with a total population of 6.524 million. It has nine distinctive regions referred as districts with Petaling district as the most central and urbanized (Dept of Statistics, Malaysia 2020).

Within the district are sub-districts where municipal councils run the management and township planning. Sunway – Subang is in the district of Petaling, with the city of Subang Jaya registering a population of 1,321,672 in 2019 (all-populations.com 2022). Subang and Sunway are delineated under the jurisdiction of Petaling district. The New Pantai Expressway (NPE) cuts through these two townships. The north side of the NPE is the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) domain, with the south side falling under the jurisdiction of Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ). Subang and Sunway are within the purview of MBSJ.

Subang Jaya attained city status after it was elevated from a municipal to a city. To be reclassified as a city, eleven criteria have to be fulfilled. These are (1) an established administrative centre; (2) a population exceeding half a million; (3) a fiscally sustainable annual income beyond RM100 million; (4) increased, sustainable infrastructure and urban development; (5) provision of higher level of services; (6) identity of a city with historical and heritage values; (7) industrial centres, financial and hotel facilities with focus on services, value-added economic developments which are knowledge-oriented; (8) establishing educational institutions, public libraries and museums; (9) promoting and hosting cultural activities, sports and recreational events, venues to host national and international conventions; (10) adequate public and infrastructural facilities like public parks, with provision for the physically challenged; and (11) duly recognized as meeting the standards of a city nationally or internationally (Wong 2020). These conditions fit the profile of the phenomenon of attrition among emerging adults in our AG churches in Malaysia, which has greatly impacted the churches in western societies similarly.

## **Delimitations**

In an effort to have a focal point, some delimitations are set in this research. Firstly, this research is limited to church size in attendance between fifty to four hundred in the English-speaking congregations. The location is limited to Sunway – Subang environment as a representation of the common experience of the urban AG churches.

Secondly, my church and another AG church will form the baseline for the data collection. While every church is different in its culture and ethos, nevertheless the commonalities are in Pentecostal heritage, and a strong emphasis on the “self-governing, self-propagating & self-supporting” principle inherent to all AG churches regardless their locale. It will give a *biopic* view of the general urban church experience of the emerging adults’ attrition phenomenon. It may grant us a general understanding of this burning issue and perhaps develop a discipleship approach towards it.

Thirdly, the terminology *denomination* will be used in reference the AG, instead of a *cooperative fellowship* as other Christian bodies or denominations more commonly refer to the former. The results from the respondents are from within the denomination, in the CDC and specifically Sunway – Subang geographical area. Selected leaders in the national, district and departmental structures will be included in the data collection. Fourthly, the writer acknowledges that he is no expert in understanding or analyzing human behavior. The notion that I can arrive at an approach to discipleship does not preclude the possibility that its applicable component may be limited to the geographical setting delimited. What would be inherently true will be my desire to grow in understanding and be part of the solution. It is with this humble idea that others may stand to benefit from what is presented in this research.

## **Detailed Research Plan**

The proposed research category is Mixed Method research employing both quantitative and qualitative approach. I am looking at three elements to get to the answers to the research question and sub-questions.

### Data Collection: Three Elements

The first element in the data collection strategy is through researching available *archival resources* from AG churches in the Central District Council as the Sunway – Subang AG churches belong to this fraternity. There are currently eight AG churches: six in Subang and two in Sunway. This will include the National Youth Department records, now known as Youth Alive Department. This is to determine if there is a pattern of emerging adult attrition affecting the AG churches in the urban.

In developing a discipleship approach for the emerging adults, it would help to survey strategies that have been employed in the past till the present time in efforts to disciple the youth in general. Not much has been initiated to address the need of the young adults in the past. There was the single adults fellowship initiative, but it ended prematurely as it was perceived as a matchmaking entity more than intentional discipleship for youth transiting into work environment.

The second element is through questionnaire, focus group, and interviews “to gain insights about a particular context and better understand and interpret it from the perspective(s) of those involved” (Saunders 2009, 150). A general questionnaire will be addressed to the Central district English speaking churches in the Sunway - Subang environment. Data like size of youth, emerging adults and overall size will be collected. It will include questions on discipleship approach or emphasis employed in the church ministry. This will include activities, strategies, initiative et cetera to determine what is perceived to be effective or not. This will help determine factors why they stay or leave. It will shed light on their behaviour and decision. As a researcher, I want to unearth their viewpoints, and not impose my own presupposed assumptions. This is done using personal interviews and focus groups (where possible).

One key challenge would be time as I plan to interview a cross section of stakeholders – senior pastors, youth or young adult pastors, youth leaders, youth (serving in church and those who have left the AG churches in Sunway - Subang environment). I would like to hear their stories and building my conclusion from their experiences.

The third and main element is doing case study on my church and another church (isolating four groups: those who remain, those who left for other churches, those who are churchless faith, and those who left the faith). Two case studies will be implemented

for the Sunway – Subang environment as the particular context of this research. Group focus interviews will be conducted here. If possible, engaging those who have left would be sought. These would include those who have moved to other churches, churchless faith, and abandoned faith.

### Data Analysis

“The process of bringing order, structure, and meaning” from the qualitative data, placing the “raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine data in a holistic fashion, and to find a way to communicate the interpretation to others” (Sensing 2011, 194) would be challenging. It is with the hope of gaining an understanding *why* it is happening in order that I may propose an approach to address it meaningfully.

The conclusions will be drawn from the findings to address the issue in question. A general understanding of the factors impacting the emerging adults is needed to engage meaningfully in current conversations taking place on the emerging adults. I will draw from specific aspects in the fields of Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology to assist our understanding of this phase of a person’s life cycle in relation to the changes taking place in our present time.

A comprehensive review of the relevant literature is reflected in chapter two. Much of the resources were sources through Kindle and Amazon, especially newer works published between five to eight years after 2010. As the research is scoped towards the current realities, much of the literature reviewed fall in this period to tap into the current conversation on the emerging adults. This phenomenon began at the advent of the millennial (Gen Y) at the end of twentieth century, with subsequent Gen Z. They form the *iGeneration* in a post-modern, post-Christian world.

Specifically, very few Asian titles (none in Malaysian context) were written on the attrition of emerging adults. While there are some on discipleship from an Asian perspective, it touches generically on young adults, and not specifically. It is perceived by this researcher that this work will fill some gaps, and be a catalyst for future studies.

The literature review has shed light of the importance of intergenerational faith within the faith community and faith transmission. Parental (inclusive of grandparental) and other relationships contribute to create stable and good points of reference in facing

life's challenges. It has given this researcher a better understanding of the youth development at various stages. It has also highlighted that this phenomenon affects the urban churches more than the rural in this postmodern world. The works of Arnett (2010, 2015), Bengston (2013), Chan (2008, 2011), Clark (2015, 2016), Estep (2012), Fernando (2019), Jamieson (1998), Harris (1989), Kinnaman (2007, 2011), Moller (2016) and Powell (2016) will be consulted to help develop a discipleship approach to address the attrition of the emerging adult in the AG churches in the Sunway – Subang environment.

### **Developing a Discipleship Process for the Local Church**

In seeking to address the attrition, I will draw from the Bible examples and selected passages like Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (Moses and the second generation of Israelites); 1 Kings 19:19-21 (Elijah and Elisha); Jesus and the Twelve disciples, and 2 Timothy 1:3-5 (Timothy, Lois and Eunice) and five current Youth ministry views, namely Gospel Advancing, Reformed, Adoption, Ecclesial, and D6 to address it (Clark 2015).

These five views have overlapping emphases that highlight the importance of the faith community and the family institution. I am seeking to understand faith transmission from a generation to another, and perhaps see any parallel, factors or reasons that may result in attrition. The premise of the research is to address it with sound, biblical principles – doing theology in a fast-changing urban world. In trying to address the attrition phenomenon, I want to examine if there is disparity in our discipleship process and what is the lack in our approach when we disciple our young. Is there significant difference between the Baby Boomers and the Generation Y (and subsequent generations) towards discipleship?

I hope to derive principles and develop a discipleship approach in a local church that aids our young to commit themselves in the Christian faith and service throughout their lives. This commitment may mean a faith that has been redefined and reflected different from conventional forms and expression in a post-modern world. My concerns are aptly described by Sensing, “DMin projects are ministry interventions designed to address particular problems for specific contexts” (60).

## **Review of the Chapter**

Lao Tzu made a powerful statement that “the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” Personally, it is a giant step for me to embark on this research. Santayana’s quote continues to echo in my mind and heart. The aim to retain this learning experience has present and futuristic ramifications on my call as a Christian, a pastor, a district superintendent and national leader.

It affects the call to make disciples. It is a call to develop sticky faith disciples. The present and future church, its vibrancy, its life, its purpose and mission hinge on it. In understanding why emerging adults stay or leave church, it will aid the process to develop a discipleship approach for the emerging adults in English-speaking churches in the Sunway – Subang, Malaysia.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review sought to understand what shaped the world of the emerging adults and their perception of church, faith and spirituality. It covers materials written on the disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology, ecclesiology and theology. While there is an abundance of literature on the emerging adults from the Western perspective, mainly American context, it is scarce on the Asian context, and perhaps none that I have come across for the Malaysian scene. My hope is as more Asians engage in theological reflections; more resources will become available.

This literature review here has four parts. In part one, the term *emerging adults* is defined so that we limit the scope of our discussion when we refer to youth and young adults. The common understanding can vary from culture to culture, country to country. I will highlight briefly the world that the emerging adults, setting for us the context that they are in and factors that have influence and shaped them. Understanding their worldview and perspective is key to our conversation for this research. The view through their lenses accords to us a better appreciation of how they make decisions, what they think, why they behave in certain manner et cetera.

The second part highlights the push factors that led to their decision to leave the church. We will survey the scope of the phenomenon, and make comparison between the Western and Asian church, and in specific Malaysia Assemblies of God fellowship. This is important to give us a handle and understanding the similarities and points of divergence. For instance, the rain in London and Kuala Lumpur will result in cooler weather. Both cities are developed metropolitans and densely populated. However, the dissimilarity comes from colder climate of London in comparison to tropical Kuala Lumpur. The former is largely known as a Christian nation in the past, whereas the latter is a Muslim majority nation. The factors that led to the decision to leave can be similar, and at the same time dissimilar because of these diversities.

We will also deal with the next logical question when they leave the church, what are they leaving *to*? It will cover the period on post-church affiliation, and the meaning of their leaving the church and the condition of the personal Christian faith.

The third part highlights the pull factors for the emerging adults to remain in the church. The focus is looking at what is helping to motivate and address the general trend experienced in many churches. It may well be an array of approaches, contexts and church cultures that have promoted these exceptions to the current trend of attrition. Here, we will also look at biblical examples that can shed light on this phenomenon.

Part four looks at what has been done in the past and present to address the needs of the emerging adults. We will look at some of the approaches undertaken by the church at large and glean their strengths and weaknesses. This is not an attempt to import a particular methodology or approach as if it is a mantra or a magical wand. Following and participating in this conversation may help us examine what we are doing right, and amending what is lacking. In the Christian context, a whole lot has to do with this term *discipleship*. This has many interpretations and implementations, shaped by traditions and theological biases. We will also review our *ecclesiology* and the various attempts and initiatives to *be* and *do* church in the postmodern context.

As a way forward, I seek to develop a discipleship approach that can be helpful to address the attrition of emerging adults in the church by drawing principles employed in the churches that are demonstrating effectiveness in addressing the attrition trend.

### **Four Scenarios**

Four scenarios have shaped my journey of faith, which began more than thirty years ago. I have been blessed, encouraged, and challenged by people God has brought along my pathway of spiritual growth and maturity. These were leaders who had imparted into my life their enthusiasm, vision, and faith in the Lord. Their efforts and sacrifices have helped shaped and contributed to who I have become presently.

I have included these scenarios, as they are pertinent to my research interest. My personal experience sparked this curiosity when I was an emerging adult, a term which was not known then. I observed that youth in my church “disappear” once they were in college, or when they enter the labour market.

### Those Who Remained in the Church

Among these youth, some have persevered till today, serving as pastors and leaders in our churches and fellowship, henceforth called denomination as commonly acknowledged beyond the Assemblies of God (AG) circle. Today they are my co-workers in the field, and have remained steadfast in their faith from the days of youth ministry in the 1980's. There are those who have remained, and have become less engaged or involved in church, like *A* who is still consistent in church attendance.

### Those Who Have Left the Church And No Longer Attend Church

Among them are those who have become very successful in their career and business. Materially, they are blessed and have their ambitions achieved. Other priorities have become more forefront and pressing. They were my buddies that had served through the years in youth ministry. Musical production, evangelistic outreach, Sunday school et cetera featured all of us. We were passionate and committed to the activities and ministries of the church. They are no longer to be seen in church today. I chanced on meeting one of them last year at the funeral of his grandma. As we chatted about the past and getting updates on the current, I discovered that *A's* brother, *B* was no longer attending church. He has a beautiful family with two daughters. He was one of those who was "on fire" and a contagious flame to others. Once he started working, transiting to the emerging adulthood phase, he started to disappear from the church scene. His faith was somewhat there in a dormant state. Unlike his brother *A* who is a year older than him, *B* has remained in church, but somewhat less engaged. *A* no longer serves in church ministries, but relatively consistent in the church attendance.

### Those Who Left Church and Embraced Another Religion

This sister was a great encourager and steadfast character in the youth ministry. She was dependable and fully engaged in youth ministry. She married a non-believer. She has abandoned her personal faith and embraced her husband's Chinese religious practices and faith. It did not occur to me that she would no longer identify herself as a Christian.

## Those Who Have Left the Church But Retained Their Faith

They have retained their faith and still acknowledged themselves to be Christians without any church affiliation. Jameison (1988) in his dissertation described them as the *churchless faith* group. From my observation, the common thread is that these four scenarios took place during the transition from secondary schooling to college and tertiary, and work life. There seems to be a repeated pattern that I have observed throughout more than thirty years in full-time ministry: our youth are dropping out from church.

### Description of the Literature Surveyed

The sciences of humanity are very advance and greatly developed in America to analyze this phenomenon with extensive poll, survey and research carried out by organizations like Gallup Poll, The Barna Group, Pew Research Center, Nielsen Ratings et cetera. Thus, they are in the forefront of the conversation.

The disciplines of sociology, psychology and anthropology can help us understand *why* emerging adults leave or remain in the church. Their behaviour, decision and worldview are briefly observed from the standpoint of the specific contributions of these fields. It is not an attempt to go into the technicalities the studies. However, understanding *what* may have prompted their decisions and actions in relation to church affiliation may help somewhat to understand and address my concerns. Drawing from the conversations from the past to the present may allow us to peek into this phenomenon.

Arnett's works *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood* (2010) and *Emerging Adulthood* (2015) are good primary sources to understand the psychological framework of the world of emerging adulthood. Kinnaman's *unChristian* (2007) and *You Lost Me* (2011) are works written out of the extensive primary data collected over the years from teens and young adults. The two works, together with Packard and Hope's *Church Refugees* (2015) provide sociological and anthropological handles for us to peek into the trends among emerging adults.

Conversations into the world of ecclesiology will help us see the *form* and *substance* of what *is* church. A proper understanding of its nature, purpose and mission of the church is needful in helping emerging adults theologically express their spirituality and faith in a post-modern environment. It may open up a new understanding *how* church is constituted and can look like in a postmodern, post-Christian world. Again, it is drawing on the various conversations taking place in our world today, and may be helpful to see the manifold expressions and practices of what we understand church to be. Keller's *Center Church* (2012) and Kimball's *The Emerging Church* (2003) will be of help here.

To gird this, a theological perspective is needful as the forms and substance should reflect biblical coherence in addressing the concern at hand: developing a discipleship process to address the attrition and participation of the emerging adults in the Assemblies of God churches in Sunway – Subang environment. It would answer the questions, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” and “How it is lived out in the midst of the feverish pace of change in our world today?”

The Western lenses, in particular American Christianity, dominate much of the literature reviewed by this writer. Not much has been written from the Asian perspective, in particular the Malaysian context. It may be assumed that Christianity in Asia is not facing such phenomenon like our Western counterpart, and therefore, limited conversation on this issue. Perhaps, Asian experience is dissimilar to that of the West. But what was described earlier has recurred again in the present group of youth in our AG denomination. There seems to be a pattern that affects us globally. And it is not unique to the Western experience. That the Asian perspective on this phenomenon has not been highlighted or made the headlines does not mean we are not experiencing it. This is felt increasingly in the AG churches in Malaysia and the pressure to address it has multiplied as the attrition rate is on the rise. While this is not based on any research done, my exposure as a denominational leader to the AG churches and feedback affirm what has been observed. This cuts across our AG denomination, with very few exceptions. Much of the literature reviewed covered the views of North America and Western democracies of Europe, and Australasia.

Finding reasons or factors that have contributed to it – whether sociological, physical, psychological, or spiritual – may help address it more effectively and relevantly. The preceding literatures indicate deeper issues that on the surface. We cannot take any

comfort that it is a global thing, or that someone should be faulted. That is not the purpose of this paper.

### **World of the Emerging Adults**

Emerging Adulthood, Teens and young people have been referred to in a broad category as youth. American categorizes youth between the ages of thirteen to twenty-four into three categories: early adolescents (under fourteen), middle adolescents (fifteen to seventeen), late adolescents and early adulthood (eighteen to twenty-four) (Youth Policy Labs 2014). In Malaysia, youth is classified between the ages of fifteen and forty, while specific programme for youth development and activities are targeted for the range of eighteen to twenty-five (Youth Policy Labs 2014). This is generally the segment of society referred to both in the state and federal levels.

Previously, references are made to teens and adolescence, and young adults. The age range covered did not highlight nor appreciate the fact that difference and disparity exist within the gap of adolescence to young adulthood. It was not until Arnett's seminal work (2000, 469) that the term *Emerging adulthood* became prominent. It highlighted "a distinct period demographically, subjectively, and in terms of identity explorations," a period that "is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations" which are "the most *volitional* years of life". Increasingly, there is recognition of this development of the youth into adulthood and this is reflected in a host of literature touching on certain aspects of their development and life – mirrored in their lifestyle, career, religious and spiritual adherences, and outlook of life.

### **Youth World**

The world of the youth has evolved and changed rapidly with the digital era. It has influenced their world view and perspective of life (and faith). For instance, Mueller's *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (2006) helps us understand youth in a postmodern culture, which has not been clearly understood and often times misunderstood. He contends that, "The emerging generations are self-consciously spiritual, and their interest in discussing and examining spirituality continues to rise" (Location 81). Erwin's *A Critical Approach to Youth Culture* aims at helping the reader to develop "a

greater understanding of how and why culture shapes the identity of adolescents” (2010, Location 85). Lancaster touched on the “generational challenges in hiring, retaining or motivating” (2002, Location 155) while Kadakia’s *The Millennial Myth* (2017) addresses the misunderstanding and misperception towards emerging adults in work places because of the generational gaps. The common observation is emerging adults is that they do not stay long in a given employment, and are very career mobile. This is unlike the youth of the Baby Boomer generation.

Some like Smith and Snell peek into the religious and spiritual lives of the American emerging adults of eighteen to twenty-three as they transit from the high schools and homes into adulthood. What is interesting in *Souls in Transition* (2009) is that it tracked and follow-up on an earlier research five years ago in *Soul Searching* (2005). They postulated “adolescence and young adulthood are also life stages when religious conversion is likely to take place” (Smith and Denton, Location 125). A later work *Lost in Transition* (2011) looks into the dark side of the world of emerging adulthood through a third wave of survey and interview conduct in 2008 on the same youth earlier. Together, these three books show the timeline development of the teenagers until they have entered into emerging adulthood and of what has become of them.

More recent works like Twenge’s *iGen* (2017) shows the major shift in attitudes and behaviour of the *I*Generation in comparison to previous generation with the *iPhone* introduction about 2012. White’s *Meet Generation Z* urges a rethink of the church strategy to engage “the rise of the nones and the coming force of Generation Z” (2017, Location 120) to reach them in a postmodern world, post-Christian. Seemiller’s *Generation Z* (2019) revealed the older generations have impacted and shaped the younger generation in the way they perceive, make sense and behave in the postmodern world.

Dunn and Sundene highlighted the role of mentors in the journey to transit into adulthood, and offering perspective that pointed emerging adults back to Jesus, His Word and His community (2012). Clark’s work *Starting Right* urges the church to doing the first task when approaching youth ministry – the task to think theologically – “to reflect on why we do what we do, or whom we do it for” (2010, Location 228).

So, who are the emerging adults? It would be difficult to just define them with a technical term employed by Arnett. To appreciate and understand their world, I have limited my focus on five things that have shaped the world of the emerging adults based on the literature that have been reviewed.

With the transition from secondary and high school, youth are moving into another phase of their life. Transitions like job movement, migration, new relationship, high school to college and tertiary education, school benches to work life et cetera bring stress as it involves “change and movement from the familial to the unknown” (Treadway 2017, 25). In a recent move by the Malaysian government, it was decided that the youth age be capped between fifteen and thirty, instead of forty in the past (The Star Online, 2019). There is increasing recognition to the importance of the youth to the process of nation building, and their voice matter. This is reflected by the recent amendment to the Malaysian constitution to have automatic registration and eligibility for youth attaining eighteen years of age to vote. Their capacity to register their opinions has come about with the instant connectivity via mobile apps and devices. The world of the emerging adults is synonymous with a digital world: events happening in real time, at a click of a button.

### Personal Independence and Flexibility

“Several studies have indicated that deciding on one’s belief and values is one criterion young people view as most important to becoming an adult” (Arnett 2002, 452), and that their “independence from their parents’ beliefs as a good and necessary thing” (464). Since this is a period of exploration, self-expression and independence are exerted, many times to the chagrin of parents. Arnett and Tanner state that the “cognitive change” emerging adults experience encompass “a particular worldview” which also recognizes the “element of subjectivity in any worldview and diverse points of view...as adding to the total picture of what the truth is” (2006, 306). In exerting their independence, their willingness to accommodate and accept other worldview correlates with their openness to experiment with new ideas, experiences and things.

## Increasingly Less Religious

According to Pew research, “young adults are significantly less likely to be affiliated with a religious group” (especially North America, Europe and Latin America) and “less likely to say that religion is very important” globally. It was also noted that those young adults (ages eighteen to thirty-nine) would less likely attend religious services or pray daily compared with the older adults (forty and above) across all religions (2018).

Large segments of the Western world are increasingly less religious, less aligned to what was known as Christian, with the emerging adults forming the largest group. Europe is moving “towards a post-Christian society” in which “a majority of young people in a dozen countries do not follow a religion” (Sherwood, 2018). Smith noted that the American teenagers “leave faith behind primarily because of intellectual skepticism (2005, 89). He follows the development of their religious and spiritual lives “as youth enter and begin to move through emerging adulthood” (2009, Location 171). In both books, the view is that American emerging adults are significantly less religious than previous generation.

It is therefore not surprising to observe sharp drops in emerging adults in church affiliation and participation. This trend has steadily increased since it started with the Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964. Kinnaman posited, “essentially Boomers popularized the church dropout phenomenon” (2011, 11). It was described as defection “in large numbers from the churches, and most did not return,” and that the phenomenon of “younger adults missing from many churches is old news, repeated time and again” and that it is continuing with “increasing gap” (Powell and Jacka 2008, 6).

Pew’s finding reveals that

The vast majority of people around the world claim a religious identity, such as Christian, Muslim or Hindu. But there is a clear age gap: Out of 106 countries surveyed, young adults are significantly less likely to be affiliated with a religious group in 41.

Of the forty-one listed, South Korea, Australia and Japan stood out as Asia-Pacific countries reflecting the Western trend, with “some of the world’s biggest gaps.” However, “17 out of 20 countries show no significant contrasts” (2018). One observation can be seen here, that these countries are developed economies. The

question is whether this phenomenon is peculiar to an urban setting. Is there any connection between religious affiliation and urbanization?

### Sociological Change

Sociological changes in the postmodern world have stretched the maturing process of youth. Moller notes that it “takes considerably longer to get established as an adult than it did only half a century ago” with prolonged education and lifespan (2016, 19-20). It was noted by Jamieson that the delayed transition into adulthood has disturbed “the whole network of roles and relations they have formed” (1998, 77). For instance, “America’s youngest generations are less likely to marry during their 20s. Nearly 50% of baby boomers were married between the ages of 18 to 32, while a mere 26% of millennials are married in the same age range” (Taylor 2019).

Smartphones, tablets and devices have become major stumbling blocks to social interaction over a meal, family time and personal relationship development. Increasingly, these devices are sources of our disconnectedness. I note how a friend related her experience one day. Her repeated calls to her son to come down for a meal went unanswered. Exasperated, she messaged her son’s hand phone. He appeared at the dining table at miraculously speed! It is a common sight that families can be at the restaurant, fully engaged with their devices but not to each other. Twenge observed that there was an “abrupt shift in teens” behavior and emotional states around 2012 (Kindle Location 127). It correlated as the period when the American public started to own smartphones with easy access to the Internet. She pointed out “the product of this sudden shift is *iGen*” (Location 134). Social interaction has changed dramatically.

Another significant change trending presently is the redefinition of two important institutions in our society: the marriage and family. There has been shift in the way these two institutions are viewed and perceived. For example, the family is no longer “defined as a male husband and a female wife, much fewer involving children. Male with male, female with female, children with surrogates, multiple parents, polygamy, and polyamorous unions abound” (White 2017, Location 182).

The postmodern world is experiencing disruptions in the family unit, with increasing pressure from alternative lifestyle of cohabitation, sexual orientation and identification

and view of sexuality. There is a current conversation and debate in some Western democracies in which a person can so choose one's preferred gender association. Gender fluidity will soon gather momentum, as can be seen with the gay right movement earlier. Among the emerging adults, it is common to have friends from the LGBTQ preference. Unlike the Boomer generation, they are more sympathetic and accepting. The changing new norms create destabilizing impact and emerging adults have gravitated towards a more liberal stand and choice. In turn, this has exerted pressure on the way Christians view this issue. Emerging adults "have grown up in a social environment where freedom of choice is taken for granted, and right and wrong are considered a matter of personal opinion" (Penner et al. 2011, 70). They do not view the Church nor religion as having an absolute or final say on this. Increasingly, this is challenged as unsuitable and not keeping with the times. In the words of Evans from the millennial generation, "young adults perceive evangelical Christianity to be too political, too exclusive, old-fashioned, unconcerned with social justice and hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people" (2013).

#### Electronic Media Explosion

The single, most impactful development that shaped our postmodern world is the introduction of the Internet and the ease by which we can access information at the tip of our fingertips. It has changed the way people obtain, view and interpret information. Veracity of information does not rank high in the dissemination of information obtain from e-media, forums, chats et cetera. The speed at which information is passed on opens up another buzzword: *viral* it. The recent weeks of protest in July and August 2019 in Hong Kong, though not having key leadership figurehead, were organized via e-media. At the push of the button, a message becomes viral and can gain significant responses. Social media has levelled the platform for all. It has empowered and enabled everyone to participate in the public sphere of the Internet world. Chan aptly puts it that "social media gives everyone a voice, so everyone chooses to raise theirs" (2018, Location 233). It has become a key concern of some governments in recent years to address the misuse and abuse of the e-media with newly crafted legislation. In recent times, the Malaysian parliament passed a new act, *Malaysian Anti Fake-News Acts 2018*. However, "on October 9, 2019, the Dewan Rakyat, the lower house of Malaysia's Parliament, voted to pass the Anti-Fake News (Repeal) Bill 2019 (D.R.

26/2019), which will repeal the Anti-Fake News Act 2018.” This bill is still pending as the upper house of the Parliament voted against it (Library of Congress 2019). On the other hand, the Singaporean counterpart introduced the *Singapore Protection from Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill 2019* respectively to curb the menace.

Encyclopedias have been made obsolete as the primary source of information. The buzzword to search anything is “Google it”. Kinnaman called “our accelerated, complex culture that is marked by phenomenal access, profound alienation, and a crisis of authority: *digital Babylon* (19). The generation today is raised entirely in which e-media is the *lingua franca*. The devices that can connect us ironically have detached us from one another. It has dehumanized human communication and connection. A screen replaces a human face!

The Bible as the key source of authority in the past is no longer viewed as such. In the digital world, “the Bible is one of many voices that interpret human experience; it is no longer viewed as the central authority over people and society” (Kinnaman, Matlock and Hawkins 2019). The globalized nature of source of information opens up a plethora of alternative views previous hidden or uncovered. An emerging adult in Malaysia has the similar access to it as with the counterpart in America or Europe.

#### Urbanization and High Living Cost

According to the United Nation report (2018), the percentage of population in urban and rural areas of Malaysia was 20% and 80% respectively in 1950. It projects that by 2050, 80% percentage of the Malaysian population will be in the urban. As of 2018, 76% of the population is in the urban setting in comparison to 20.4% in 1950. Essentially, this would mean congestions with increased density and demand for housing, amenities et cetera. Tisdale describes urbanization as “a process of population concentration” proceeding in a twofold manner: “the multiplication of points of concentration and the increase in size of individual concentrations” (1942, 311). Inevitably, the pressure on renting and house ownership becomes a major concern for the emerging adults. Increasingly, owning a property has become an unreachable dream for many, a possibility for some (with assistance from parents) as prices escalates beyond the emerging adult financial affordability.

As more and more young people migrate towards the city for better opportunities for education and work, the overcrowding will result in more sociological concerns. Malaysia is neither a developed nation nor a third world country. It has an advanced economy, but it is not uniform in the development of every state. An observation was made earlier in the paper with regard to the connection between religious affiliation and urbanization. Arnett's points out that economics play a part in an urban versus the rural divide, that "emerging adulthood is often experienced in urban areas but rarely in rural areas" (2000, 477). I have observed that this matter is connected closely with the rapid urbanizing world, with the consequential impacts it has on society in the postmodern world.

In summary, the world of the emerging adults is significantly different from Boomers generation. The ferocity of change has altered the way people interact and relate. Increasingly, managing such rapid changes has become a difficult task. The values and worldview are changing, being shaped by these changes. Transiting from youth into adulthood has become more difficult. The irony of life is that a Boomer invented devices like the iPhone, which has precipitated rapid changes of a modern world into a postmodern world for the emerging adults.

The factors describing our world of today have a great impact on the way youth and emerging adults respond, in particular to the religious expectations and experience. Their personal independence and flexibility view to life affect their perception of faith passed down from their parents. Personal choice and preference win over what they have experience growing under the shadow of their parents. That they are willing to try new things and are flexible to adopt other views including religious beliefs in a period of exploration and self-expression would have far reaching impact on what tradition considered as norm.

Their declining religiosity in comparison to their parents would be a strong push factor in a postmodern idea of religiosity versus spirituality. Increasingly, they are leaning towards experiential elements, not just on a set of beliefs and doctrinal statements of the church. They want personal engagement that impacts the world that they belong to, beyond the walls of the church. Coupled with the sociological changes in which society becomes more disconnected, with marriage and family being redefined, these pose newer challenges that the church had not encountered before. The way the church has

responded thus far has turned emerging adults away where they perceived the church as narrow, outdated, irrelevant and unimportant in a fast-changing environment.

With the electronic media explosion, truth is now perceived to be out there. It is no longer the domain of the Bible to rule. Emerging adults are shifting their reliance more and more on their ability to access information and “truth” beyond the authoritative ambit of the Scriptures. The church and affiliation to it becomes a minor interest, and of lesser importance in comparison to their parents.

And in trying to cope with the escalating cost of living in the urban environment, youth who migrate to cities from education and job opportunities become more detached from social networks that have nurtured their spirituality, opening them to pressures not faced before in their teenage years. These factors would play a big role in the push factor for emerging adults to leaving church.

### **Push Factors Why Emerging Adults Leave the Church**

It has been stated often times that without fire, there is no smoke. The reality is there were factors to *why* the emerging adults were leaving church. The Barna report “raised an alarm with American data suggesting 6 in 10 churchgoing teens become spiritually disengaged after high school” (Penner et al. 2011, 9). It has to be stated that there is a key difference between *leaving church* and *leaving faith*. It cannot be assumed that when a person leaves the church, it meant abandonment of one’s faith. Cronshaw, Lewis and Wilson made this very important distinction between two terms used to describe the phenomenon: *haemorrhaging church* and *haemorrhaging faith*. The “distinction is between church engagement and faith,” should be clarified as assumption are made “dropping their faith occurs as they disengage from church-related practices and community life” (2016, 18). While it may be true that some abandon their faith with their leaving the church, the same cannot be assumed for all who leave.

Why then are the emerging adults leaving the church in big number that the description is liken to hemorrhaging? It gives an impression that it is bleeding profusely, and if nothing is done to address it, the patient will bleed to death. McNeal offers a bleak diagnosis that “the current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order” (2009, Location 241). Three key conversations are examined here on why they

leave church. They form the underlining observations that have similarities with our Malaysian experience.

### Perception of Institutional Church

The research by Deloitte in 2019 revealed “respondents express a strong lack of faith in traditional societal institutions, including mass media, and are pessimistic about social progress.” Packard and Hope, in their sociological study, describe in their book *Church Refugees* (2015) that some segments of Christians are done with the institutionalized form of “church”, and wanting a fresher form of church expression like the emergent church. Their thesis suggests that these Christians are *dechurched*, *Dones* (done with church). They represent “people who make explicit and intentional decisions to leave the church and organized religion” (Location 181). They are redrafting how church is *done*.

“The dropout phenomenon is most accurately described as a generation of Christians who are disengaging from institutional forms of church. Young people are leaving established congregations” (Kinnaman 2011, 70). By institutional church, we are referring to “organized groups of professing Christians who meet in designated church buildings and follow prescribed schedules for weekly worship.” These “institutional churches are ‘established’ in that they follow general patterns for organization and worship” (Got Questions Ministries, 2019). Getz elaborates the reality that “the process of institutionalization is a recurring phenomenon among God’s people,” that “it happens naturally wherever you have people band together to achieve certain objectives” (1984, 251).

We need to distinguish the nature of the church from the institution. Kittel gives an accurate understanding what a church, *ekklesia*, is. He points out that “every true early Christian congregation was just as good a representation of the whole body as the primitive congregation at Jerusalem,” and not when individual congregations gradually formed larger organizations... from the individual to the corporate” (1965, 535). So, when people organize themselves and adhere to set patterns and values, they become institutionalized. There is nothing harmful or evil in it.

However, the perception towards the *Institutionalised Church* today carries a negative connotation of rituals, rigidity and lifelessness. Jamieson (1998) and Arnett highlighted the “skepticism about the value of religious institutions” in society (Arnett 2002, 462) among the emerging adults. The postmodern world “is marked by skepticism and a loss of confidence in knowledge and in the doctrine of Progress,” “that human beings are progressively and inevitably making the world a better place to live” (Penner et al. 2011, 12). The emerging adults do not see that the institutional church can contribute or make society a better place. Startling data revealed the clash and disconnect between generations – modern versus postmodern – how it impacted perceptions, faith and beliefs. “Belief, behaviour, and belonging are three intertwined strands of religious faith” (Bass 2013, 47). Bass revealed that there was “a profound lack of trust and confidence in conventional beliefs, practices, and organizations” (48). Their perception and observation of the church differs greatly from the Boomer generation. The late Bob Buford, a cable television entrepreneur, aptly described, “That the next generation is not just sort of different; they are *discontinuously* different (Kinnaman, 37-39).

In comparison to the modern generation, postmodernists are skeptical of the institutionalised church. “We’re not leaving the church because we don’t find the cool factor there; we’re leaving the church because we don’t find Jesus there” (Evans 2013). There is a profound dissatisfaction and frustration with the church. These are “not critics from the outside” but “leaders who don’t like what they are experiencing in church” who are expressing fundamental doubts about the viability of the church” (McNeal, Location 174). More recently, the reason for their leaving the church was not “because they have lost faith.” Rather, they are leaving the church to preserve their faith. They contend that the church no longer contributes to their spiritual development” (Location 295). When the value and perceived purpose are missing, these add to the decision to leave for the emerging adults.

Kinnaman’s *You Lost Me* highlights “their perceptions of churches, Christianity, and culture...their concerns, hopes, delusions, frustrations, and disappointments,” which signal their judgment that the institutional church has failed them” (2011, 11). They stated six broad reasons for leaving church: They find the church to be overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and doubtless (92-93).

## Faith versus Science

So much of life's experience and connection are tied to the advances in science and technologies. Day by day, human ingenuity creates groundbreaking leap into the future. In the Microsoft Inspire 2019 conference in Mandalay Bay Convention in Las Vegas, Julia White of CVP of Azure Marketing demonstrated a cutting-edge technological advancement. She presented a holographic video in real-time speaking to the participants in Japanese. In her demonstration, she made a declaration that by "using **Azure Hologram AI**, one can be present anywhere as an AI avatar and can speak in the desired language too" (Karmakar, 2019).

The church has incorporated some of these technological advancements in environments where there are multi-sites congregations, real time projection, digital sound management et cetera to create greater ambience in the church worship services. Some churches have gone to great length to create *servicescape* as it "can create a specific atmosphere to enhance the service experience" that can "stirs religious feelings" (Merwe et al. 2013, 2-3).

That said, emerging adults view the church as anti-science and stand in opposition to modern science. They "have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible" (Kinnaman, 92). The church's inability to accommodate and engage their questions and skepticism has caused a dichotomy in matters pertaining to faith and science. When push comes to shove, the explainable and logical are preferred.

## Emerging Issues in Society

Compounding the negative perception of the institutionalized church is the fast pace of changes taking place. The postmodern world has become increasingly complex and difficult to navigate. The acronym VUCA was first used in 1987, and then widely used in 2002 since the end of the Cold War. It stands for *volatility, uncertainty, complexity* and *ambiguity* (Glaser 2018). The rapid changes taking place has exerted much pressure on the church, and our slowness is evident. The LGBTQ issue has come to the forefront of current dialogues. Most emerging adults have personal friends and colleagues who have chosen this lifestyle. While they may not fully agree, they are sympathetic and open to them. The grouse is in the stand of the church towards this

segment of society. They felt that the church is judgmental and uncompassionate. “Most twentysomethings assume that the voices of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people should be heard in cultural conversations of any consequence” (Kinnaman, 171). The church is too exclusive and withdrawn in conversing with current issues, giving rise to the perception that the church is not in touch with reality and concerns of the day.

The emerging adults passionately champion the issues of social justice. The recent years have seen significant emerging adults participating in public demonstration for greater democratic freedom, social justice and environment concerns. For instance, in Malaysia, the four editions of *Bersih* rallies in recent memory featured many of them, with electronic media and devices employed widely.

These indicate that emerging adults want greater engagement with issues affecting them. They view church as either passive or do not encourage such social engagements. Whether the church will be missed if one day it is no more in a specific community or nation is aptly echoed by Healy about the church, “There is nothing special about the concrete church that it should expect automatic respect and love from the world” (2000, 11). Emerging adults want the church to make visible the Kingdom of God, to impact the society. Perhaps, the church is not missed, as it has not engaged the emerging issues in society meaningfully. Tied together with the perception of the church as narrow, outdated, irrelevant and unimportant, emerging adults are seeking new approach to their faith. It is like new wine in old wineskin – something has to give.

#### Those that Left

There are four categories identified with those who left the *institutional* church. The trend of emerging trend of teen attrition from church life was given prominence in the early 1990s. It was noted that since the 1960s and 1970s, there was a dramatic increase in the dropout rate. Powell described it as “defection in large numbers” beginning with the baby boom of the 1960s (2008, 6). It was assumed that these have left church, and therefore, the faith. But this assumption has been proven inaccurate.

The first category is described in Penner’s 2011 *Haemorrhaging Faith* as a total disengagement from the church and faith. They are described as *Nones*, the religiously

unaffiliated. White believes that “the future religious landscape of America will be increasingly dominated by the *Nones*: (2014, Location 135), and that church must “rethink its strategy in light of a cultural landscape that has shifted seismically” with “the coming force of Generation Z” (White 2017, Location 120). There are also known as the *disidentified* (Cronshaw 2016, 18).

The second category Jameison named as *Churchless Faith* (1998) while Packard used *the dechurched* or *Dones* (2015, Location 181) to describe them as done with church. The important observation here is the emerging adults have left church, but have not abandoned faith. They have redefined faith and its implications and practices. Barna and Kinnaman say this group represent 33% of the American population (2014) and growing rapidly. “The dechurched take their belief in God with them when they leave, but that belief is substantially different from what it was when they were engaged with organized religion” (Packard, Location 2252). Cronshaw’s 2016 critical review of the *Haemorrhaging Faith* research suggested that the report be labelled more appropriately as *Haemorrhaging Church*, to highlight the sociological distinction between disengagement and disidentification (18) – that disengaging “from church-related practices and community life” does not necessarily mean that they have dropped their faith (16). In pointing this out, he contends the point of disagreement with the Canadian research conclusion had “employed paradigms and survey instruments” of “redundant Christendom model,” and therefore “missed the nuanced and subtle nature of faith in the contemporary era” as “‘Church’ is no longer conceived of as being limited to one local church” (30).

Research revealed, “that people with access to alternative ways of reaching their goals of community and social engagement are opting out of church (Packard, Location 150-151). Bass (2012, 5) posited a soul-searching question, “What if the 1970s were not simply an evangelical revival like those of old, but the first stirrings of a new spiritual awakening, a vast interreligious movement toward individual, social, and cultural transformation?” The church has felt the tremendous impact of secularism in a postmodern world. It has challenged the assumed position church has in society.

The third category overlaps with the second category. They are not *churchless*. They are those who left to preserve their faith, seeking *new* approach to sustain their spiritual development which they concluded not taking place in the *institutional church*. These

have formed clusters of believers, and constitute what is described as the *emergent Christianity*. Tickle reiterated that

Religion, whether we like it or not, is intimately tied to the culture in which it exists.... When, however, two or three faith-filled believers come together, a religion—possibly more of a nascent or proto-religion—is formed. Once formed, it can never be separated entirely from its context. (2012, Location 209)

It can be said that this category leavers reacted to the state of the church they perceived as not viable and reflective of the Christian faith and practices. It has similar voices with undertones of a call to return back to the church of the book of *Acts*. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams was opened to the idea an *emergent* church that may look and feel completely different from what we have today. He has said repeatedly “that we are not to read and study and discuss Emergence Christianity in order that we might save the Anglican Church or any other such institution.” We do so to “discern how best to serve the kingdom of God in whatever form God is presenting it” (Tickle, Location 160).

Commenting on the Great Emergence, Bishop Dyer states, “about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur” (Tickle 2012b, Location 174). When this takes place, three things will emerge. First, “a new, more vital form of Christianity. Second, the organized expression of Christianity which up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self.” Third, the faith spreads “dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity’s reach.” (2012b, Location 176-181).

The fourth category consists of those who have renounced their faith and embraced another religion. There are various reasons and circumstances leading to this move. For instance, marrying to an adherent of Islam necessitates renouncing the former and embracing the latter. Some do not necessary renounce their faith, but embrace their spouses’ religious beliefs and practices like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism et cetera. Few do so out of deep convictions. Rather, it is occasioned by a specific need. Still others are repulsed, disappointed, angry and disillusioned that pushed them to abandonment of faith.

Then there are young adults who “leave church or faith” because “the feeling of failure becomes so intense that the only seemingly plausible solution appears to be abandoning church or Christianity” (Penner, 64). In this aspect, something could have been done to intervene to bring understanding and counsel. This can only be true *when* emerging adults have mentoring relationships of older adults to walk with them. Isolation and loneliness can exacerbate the sense of personal failure in the faith journey. When there is no nurturing relationship that they can turn to, the sense of personal struggle and personal responsibility can overwhelm them, like the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Whatever that may have contributed to the leave decision and renouncement of faith, still there still room for improvement for reasons and factors that are within our means to address. Beyond that, religious faith is never by cohesion. Most people have the choice to turn their backs to it.

I have singled out three push factors emerging adults leave the church. It is not a comprehensive list of push factors. Suffice to say, they are important concerns addressed by various authors. While there may be other factors, these are concerns, which mattered greatly to emerging adults. These three factors seem to cut across the board globally, Malaysia included.

### **Pull Factors Emerging Adults Remain in Church**

While the pile of data suggests a gloom and doom scenario, I am optimistic that there is a silver lining at the horizon. This is reflected 70.9% response that church is a vital part of their relationship with God see *Chart Q21a*). Amidst the narratives of emerging adults missing from the population of the church, there are bright stars in which emerging adults are thriving. So, what are the pull factors that they remain in the church? Among the conversations, four key factors stood out that helped the emerging adults sticking on and developing in the context of church.

#### **Intergenerational Relationship**

It was observed that while transitioning from adolescence to adulthood required skills, emerging adults that were thriving were individuals who connected “to others in a

healthy and meaningful way,” and that they “view the world in a positive light” and “are secure in the present and confident in the future” (Schreiner et al. 2012, 26). What this means was emerging adults who have developed social and soft skills were most likely to have relationship with various generations within the church fellowship. That they could *look up to* someone like a mentor, and be *responsible for* someone younger for mutual accountability assisted in the continuing and participating in the church.

In a culture that is increasingly marked by “heightened level of *access* which is changing the way young adults think about and relate to the world,” *alienation* “from the structures that undergird our society,” and *skepticism of authority* “about who to believe and why,” (Kinnaman 35-58), intergenerational relationships provide some measure of stability. The feeling of loneliness can exacerbate a sense of alienation, especially when emerging adults do not live with the family. With the breaking down of marriage, increasingly emerging adults have a poor image of parenthood and family. It is projected that one in four marriages in Malaysia will end in divorce (Dept. of Statistics Malaysia 2017). It is noted “the negative effects of high divorce rates on effective family functioning with respect to children, such as providing them with emotional, educational, and moral foundations” (Bengtson 2013, 6).

Ah Mei (*not her real name*) comes from a family whose parents divorced as she entered early adolescence.). To make matter worse, both her parents remarried and have their new sets of children. Neither of the parents has real interest in having her stay with them. She ends up being raised by her aunt and lives with the grandmother. In my conversation with her, a sense of loneliness permeated her conversation with me. The feeling of being unwanted, abandoned and unloved were her growing up experience. Thankfully, her aunty, and intergenerational group of friends in the church community filled in that void left by her biological parents. She related her personal perception that her aunt and I played a very big role in her remain faithful and active in church life. “When young people do not feel connected, it is much easier for them to walk away from something or someone” (Pace 2013, 5). Brown quoted an observation from Black’s research in 2008 which explored the role of religion and faith in high school graduates. He said that “there are clear links that “peer relationships, adult friendships, spirituality, parental influence, and participation in Christian activities” (2014, 6).

Relationships play a vital role especially in the midst of sociological changes. Material

wealth and gadgets cannot generate the warmth in a soul. The inanimate cannot induce life in the animate. When we refer to relationship, it should be relationship that nurtures and builds a person. Clark wrote *Hurt 2.0*, drawing from his data and experience from his ethnographic research (2011). He concluded that the younger generation feels alone because they lack the social capital of a genuine, non-self-serving relationship.

Adolescents felt that they “have been abandoned,” and “have, therefore, created their own world, a world that is designed to protect them from the destructive forces and wiles of the adult community” (Location 382). Having adults who they can relate and turn to helps the transition and navigational skills needed to enter into adulthood.

Bengston revealed a surprising observation “at the high rates of intergenerational religious transmission” indicating that in matters of religion, parents were very important (2013, 66). The truth is relationship between parents and child plays a very important part of the transition and the commitment a youth has to the church. The example modelled by their parents play a significant role in their decision to stay or leave as they reach emerging adulthood. As Dean puts it, “the religiosity of American teenagers must be read primarily as a reflection of their parents’ religious devotion (or lack thereof) and, by extension, that of their congregations” (2010, Location 124).

It also highlighted the increasing relevance and importance of grandparents and great-grandparents to the process of faith transmission (Bengston, Chapter 5). This affirms that intergenerational relationship is a great pull factor for emerging adults to continue in church and involvement with the faith community. The role of golden age members in a church has a greater impact than previously thought. This calls for their role to be enhanced for positive faith transmission. “The Church must recommit herself to the gospel and to discipleship to strengthen an inner core whereby families may then be strengthened” (McGarry 2019, Location 198). The role of the generations is emphasized in Deuteronomy 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

It was also the finding of Kinnaman that “there is a disciple-making gap in relationships” with “a majority of the young adults we interviewed reported never

having an adult friend other than their parents” (28-29). The often-quoted phrase *it takes a village to raise a child* “is an Igbo and Yoruba proverb that exists in many different African languages.” It reflects “the emphasis African cultures place on family and community and may have its origins in a biblical worldview” (www.reference.com). Indeed, it requires the whole community as a local church, with all generations play their part in the discipleship process.

“Teaching for faith is a continual process. Teens with ongoing faith-mentor relationships will likely stand a better long-term outcome in the church than those without such relationships” (Pace 2013, 40). The role of those who are older is significant as their experiences are helpful to provide guidance and counsel when they seek it. Peer influence is only as good as the strength of the group. If the peer group exudes positive influence, then the youth is impacted positively and vice versa.

#### Faith That Works

When reference is made to *faith that works*, I have intended that it reflected ideas and comment presented in literatures review on the current issues. One of the main complaints of the emerging adults was that the church was exclusive and perceived as not engaging the community. They are shown to be very concerned with the world that they are living in, and want to be active contributors. For the emerging adults, faith must make sense in that it should be engaging. It is not just a set of beliefs etched into the memory. McNeal aptly puts it that “many, if not most, church members have never experienced missional living. They’ve just experienced church” (Location 233).

Emerging adults are concerned about religion and “finding religion in their daily lives,” that the church is not a relevant force in society and people’s daily lives (Packard 2015, Location 261). Penner raised one crucial question, “What keeps them in faith, and what helps to usher them out?” against a backdrop of 20% of Catholic and Mainline Protestant kids, and 50% from the Evangelical tradition in Canada still attends church at least weekly as an adult (5). His findings revealed that a “vibrant church community is very important for young adults to engage in their faith,” and “the teachings and beliefs of the church must be engaging and empowering in order to capture the attention and gain the respect of twenty-somethings” (40).

What role *does* the church play in the daily lives of people? What role *should* the church play in the daily lives of people? What are the perceptions of emerging adults toward the church? How do they see church? The definite answer to these questions is core to this statement, which is, a faith that works. We have a biblical truth that should and must constantly remind us the nature of our faith:

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (James 2:18-20, NIV)

Penner observed that church attendance or religious affiliation does not mean participation. “Religious affiliation measures a person’s identification with a religious tradition. Affiliation does not necessarily indicate participation” (2014, 25).

There is a big plot in the worldview of the emerging generation with regard to affiliation. Choosing to affiliate translates into active participation. They are “passionate about social justice and caring for the people around them.” They want “to contribute significantly to the function and life of their congregations.” At the same time, they “want to participate with their churches to contribute to the community at large” (Penner, 56).

It is of great importance that the church is *missional* to the mandate given – to make disciples. The Christian faith that we preach, teach and impart must demand more, not lesser of its discipleship demands. It must not be a cheapen version without depth. Generally, people will commit themselves to a cause that attracts them. They will commit themselves to a purpose that has significance beyond the walls of the church.

The sense of *belonging*, *usefulness* and *valuable* is what makes us feel good about ourselves. Generally, Asians have a poor image of themselves. Often times, we are defined by what we have, what we can do, what we have achieved, and what we look like physically. Our self-worth is tied to everything we do (and say). When our ideas or suggestions are challenged, we perceive our *face* takes a beating. We take personal offense the criticism of our suggestion or idea. In a *faith that works* community, this sense of belonging, usefulness and valuable creates an environment where one feels safe. People can be vulnerable, and not feel that they are being judged. Emerging adults desire conversations that can help them address tough question of life and faith.

Ah Chai (not his real name) knows that his pastor's preference on the length of hair a guy spot. Those who go on stage as musicians, psalmists, worship leaders et cetera are mindful of certain expected house rules. One day, he comes on stage with his long hair tied with a ponytail. It was clear and visible to the congregation. Like any congregation, a few well-meaning older members will bring to the pastor's attention. Their concern was that the children and youth might imitate him. The pastor explains *why* Ah Chai is sporting long hair with a ponytail. There is nothing sinful or immoral about it. It was just a preference which the pastor held. He has spoken to his pastor that he is growing the hair in order to donate it to leukemia patients. He wanted to contribute to the larger community in social engagement of his faith. At the opportune moment, the pastor highlights Ah Chai's looks, and praise God for moving his heart to give to the community. The message conveyed opens up better understanding, teaches the congregation not to judge by outward appearance, and that personal preference was not paramount; God's preference is paramount.

The reason for this factual account illustrates the constant need for *all of us*, not just *some of us* to contribute to create an environment where we can feel safe and unpretentious of our faith. Ah Chan, an emerging adult, continued contributing actively and thriving because there was space created for him. Saines captures this beautifully in *Learning to be the Church*, when he said, "As learning communities, churches seek to live in a spirit of supportive but critical dialogue and discussion." This "includes provision of space to develop relationships of mutuality and dialogue and conversation, offering a sense of personal involvement, fulfilment and pleasure in what is being learnt" (2015, 306). Kinnaman adds to the chorus of voices that, "Many young adults are living out the tension of *in-but-not-of* in ways that ought to be corrected or applauded, yet instead are often criticized or rejected" (2011, 12). We can *all* do better for kingdom's sake.

### Holistic Engagement

The buzzword that we hear in the marketplace today is the term *engagement*. What does it mean and connote? When a couple is engaged, there is a *pledge* that is made to each other. It declares an intention and an announcement to enter in holy matrimony,

normally within a year. There is a commitment to whom the pledge was made. Merriam-Webster defines “emotional involvement or commitment” (2019).

The church is called to be salt and light to the world. This command Jesus gave was succinctly clear. In the past, the church was actively involved in creating and building uplift communities through education, social works et cetera. These were done with a view to engage the entire culture and present the gospel relevantly. However, it was noted that the “mode of church engagement” that was “characterized by commitment, resilience, and sacrifice among many Western believers” is fast disappearing only to be replaced by a new mode “characterized by sporadic engagement, passivity, commitment phobia, and a consumerist framework” (Sayer 2016, Location 135).

Whether we like it or not, the church has moved into a postmodern world. Increasingly, the conversations in public sphere reverberate in our churches. In the forefront are the emerging adults who are passionate about environmental issues, human rights, social justice et cetera. By holistic engagement, we have entered into the cultural engagement conversation. The church is founded within a cultural context. As much as culture shapes society, we are its stakeholders. The church as salt and light was a forceful statement of the roles each played respectively. Four views are held in the church circle; the two kingdoms, relevance, transformationist and counter-culturalist. Each represents the way the church *should* engage the culture (*read as society*). Keller points out the dilemma the church faces today. It is related to “the question of how Christians should relate to the culture around us” (2012, 181). He noted that “many Christians felt seriously out of place in their own society,” that “young adults became confused, resistant, and hostile to classic presentations of the gospel” as the Christian West no longer existed in a postmodern (*and post-Christian*) world (183). The response of the church to the social and cultural influences will determine its future in reaching the emerging adults.

Emerging adults are attracted to the church that is unafraid to engage the community and larger society in a meaningful way. When they are guided and helped in tackling difficult questions as the new norm of society, they build greater confidence in their faith. Commitment to the truth that the gospel embodies is not on a set of dogmas. We are not saved by what we know. Rather, we are saved by what we experience from the truth that we have embraced. Jesus is Lord in the mind must be demonstrated by how

the church would engage society. Finding relevance without surrendering authenticity; striking a balance of faith and works is to embody it to a very hostile culture to the Christian. “Young Christians who are willing to share their faith consistently explained that they do not believe evangelism can be separated from action.” (Kinnaman, 177). When emerging adults experience this in the church, it creates a sense of identity that is close related with the need to experience *belonging*, *usefulness* and *valuable*.

### Discipleship and Mentoring

In relation to the intergeneration relationship factor on retention of emerging adults, discipleship and mentoring are cores to helping them navigate the transition toward adulthood. While research shows that the Western emerging adults have few mature adults in their circle of friendship, this is untrue of the Asian counterpart. By and large, the Asian context demonstrates the influence of uncles and aunties, mature adults and others within the community of faith. The family institution remains strong, with divorce rate at one in four marriages. Kinnaman described the core issue of attrition “a faith-development problem, ...a disciple-making problem” in which “the church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture” (21).

Duffy posited that an “effective youth ministry is not getting young people to “swing from the trees.” Rather, it is in “helping them cling to the Vine (John 15:5)” as its mission (2012, Location 107). At the heart of discipleship is mentoring emerging adults to handle tough questions that they face in a postmodern world. As it were, they perceived the church as overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and doubtless. Sticking the head into the sand, or divorcing the mental faculty from faith will not help. The command is to make disciples and teaching them to obey in the context of a VUCA world requires honest struggle with difficult questions they might have on social issues like LGBTQ, injustices et cetera. As Dean, Clark and Rahn aptly put it, “We seldom take time to reflect on why we do what we do, or whom we do it for,” asserting that theological reflection helps connect with “what we believe about God with how we live as disciples of Jesus Christ” (2010, Location 228).

In formulating an approach to discipleship to address the attrition, it is crucial to develop an approach where “the forms of church life as a whole curriculum” is

incorporated (Harris 1989, 14). In any given church, there are embedded theological practices (Stone and Duke 2013, 15) unique to a church context. “Embedded theology comes from a religious story inherited from a faith community” which are accepted as true but has not been critically examined (Clark, Location 473).

These writers struck a core issue, which requires examining the approach we take towards discipleship of the youth and emerging adults for them to transit into adulthood with their faith intact. It is not just content like syllabus and curriculum, but the content and context in which mature adult journey with them. It should encompass the whole congregation, and not relegated to the clergy and leaders. Also, it should have the active involvement of the family.

Multi-faceted involvement ministries like the *Royal Rangers, Children, Community Outreach Programme et cetera* bring generational contributions. Children, youth, emerging and mature adults are involved in the discipleship and mentoring process: being discipled and discipling. A personal observation in my church demonstrates this to be effective to nurture the continued commitment and growth of the emerging adults. They have remained and are involved in the fabric of church life.

### Those That Stayed

It was interesting to note that for those that stayed in the local church, they were refinements to their faith. The level of ministry involvement has changed in that there was recalibration to their personal life, work demands, and church involvement. It should not be interpreted as lacking commitment by measuring man-hours with when they were youth. Instead, there is a reinterpretation of what faith and service entailed. For instance, many of those who could attend prayer meeting on a Wednesday found it very challenging to do so as emerging adults. While they could commit to a Friday cell group meeting, there was fluidity in *how* and *where* they congregated.

Therefore, the perception of lacking commitment should not be the conclusion one arrives at. There would need to be an adjustment to *how* we engage them as youth who are *emerging* into adulthood. That means change in perception and greater acceptance of what defines their faith journey. How we gird their development through intentional discipleship will deepen their faith or loosen their bolts.

In summary, the pull factors are very much interconnected with the discipleship process within the context of a local church. While some have been able to retain many of their youth into emerging adulthood, others have failed within the context of Malaysian church scene. This is not to describe that the attrition is equated with losing faith. Rather, some have left to for another church or to develop a faith expression that makes sense to them.

Mentoring intergenerational relationships, faith that works and holistic in engagement are intertwined in the discipleship process. When properly crafted and executed, I believe this to be key to addressing the attrition of emerging adult population within the AG churches, of which Sunway – Subang churches can be indicative of the wider urban setting.

### **Measures Church Employed to Address the Needs of Emerging Adults**

Various attempts and initiatives have been employed in view of the alarming attrition rate in the church attendance among the emerging adults. At the heart of this issue, it was felt that discipleship holds the key. How does one disciple the emerging adults in the postmodern environment? Most of Asia and specifically, Malaysia, are multi-religious societies. Unlike the Christian West, Asia has an eclectic of religious heritage. It would not be accurate to think of Malaysia in terms of a post-modern, post-Christian world. It is still very much religious, albeit decreasing in degree. Pew research (2015) projected the Christian population to grow “by about 33%, rising from 287 million in 2010 to 381 million in 2050” in Asia Pacific.

#### Discipleship of the Emerging Adults

So, what has been done thus far to disciple youth transiting into the emerging adults in a post-modern era? Duffy is correct to assert that “it is not about how fast young people grow; it’s about how far our young people grow” (location 116). Five views on youth ministry (Clark 2015) are summarized here.

Firstly, the *Gospel Advancing view*. According to Greg Stier, it seeks to mobilize the students “across the world to gospelize their friends until every teen everywhere hears

the gospel from a friend.” It claims to employ “a radical new paradigm that’s 2,000 years old” by implementing seven key values: intercessory prayer, relational evangelism, leaders that fully embrace and model it, disciple multiplication strategy, bold vision focus, biblical outcomes measurement, and ongoing program to reflect these values. The outcome he asserts is a gospel advancing disciple multiplying ministry ([gospeladvancing.org/about](http://gospeladvancing.org/about)). The key emphasis centres on evangelism.

Secondly, the *Reformed view*. Its proponent, Brian Cosby outlined the basic apostolic means reflected in Acts like the ministry of the word, prayer, sacraments, gospel-motivated service to save and grow His people needful for youth ministry. It seeks to serve the church at large in reaching and equipping youth for Christ through conferences, training and resources for church. At the heart of this ministry, it seeks to train the youth leaders on “theological, philosophical, and methodological foundation.” Fundamental to this view is the equipping of the “churches in their ministries to youth and families” and to “transform youth culture” to impact generations ([rym.org/mission](http://rym.org/mission)). Key to this is the role of parents in providing the leadership in families within the local church.

Thirdly, the *Ecclesial view*. In forwarding this view, Fernando Arzola wants youth ministry to have lesser “focus on the contemporary matters and more on understanding their places within the larger communion of saints.” His concern was for youth to “recover the four creedal characteristics of the church: The Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic” (Ford 2019). He proposed the prophetic youth ministry model that encompasses five keys areas of urban youth needs: the heart – nurturing the spiritual needs, the soul – nurturing the emotional needs, the strength – nurturing the physical needs, the mind – nurturing the intellectual needs, and the neighbour – nurturing the social needs (Arzola 2008, 46-49).

Fourthly, the *D6 view* by Ron Hunter. Based on the passage of Scriptures in Deuteronomy 6, his premise is on an intentional generational discipleship implemented in the home and the church. He states “we cannot medically change our DNA, but we can alter habits to become healthier. And churches can change their DNA when ministry leaders equip people for ministry rather than just do ministry” (2015, Location 194) if we do so with a long-term generational discipleship strategy.

Fifthly, the *Adoption view*. Clark states that providing the young with a crucial resource of the God-given faith community, where “the adopted person experiences the family of God as a fully embraced and included participant” (Clark 2016, Location 346). In describing the goal of youth ministry “as faithful lifelong discipleship,” he emphasized creating a church environment “where God calls his people to experience, embody, and express their faith” (Location 418). The five views have overlapping emphases that highlight the importance of the faith, community and the family institution.

### Ecclesiology: Church of the Emerging Adults

The nature of the church and its form will be discussed in this section. The term *ekklesia* denotes the call out ones. Kittel highlights, “the real point is who assembles, or who constitutes the assembly” which forms “the community of God” even from the standpoint of the Old Testament in Greek Judaism (505, 527). The important point is it can take any form so long as the *intention* and *purpose* of the gathering is unto the Lord. Synder aptly states “*all para-church structures should be subjected to continuous rigorous sociological and theological analysis to determine their effectiveness as instruments of the Church*” (1977,167-168). We should not be afraid to alter or make needed changes without “desecrating holy things” (1977, 168). On this score, we want to look at three expressions or forms of church in or postmodern society: the traditional, contemporary, and emergent.

#### **Traditional**

By traditional, we limited it to the general idea in which we are referring to the church practices that have liturgical order incorporated to its service. It follows a set of liturgical order or sequence, with songs sung that comprise of hymnals and basic musical instrument like the organ. The homily is presented and read out to the congregants. It follows after set traditional worship practices. Keller writes the inability of traditional church model in reaching the young adults. “Long-established congregations develop traditions...that reflect the sensibilities of longtime leaders who have the influence and resources to control church life” which “often do not reach the younger generations” (2012, 361). However, traditional churches did not start out in their current state. It began as a contemporary movement during the Reformation

period. Over time, they “inevitably becomes institutions” (351) with set liturgical practices and beliefs.

### **Contemporary**

What makes a church *contemporary*? Various definitions are offered to define or at best, describe it. McDaniel (2012) describes the *contemporary* church in this manner:

Walk in and hear rock music, see people wearing jeans and flip flops, and look at big video screens in church — yes, in church. Messages that focus on sex, success and decision making are also common fare. Welcome to the contemporary church.

Rev. Womack defines the contemporary church in the context of contemporary *worship* as “worship that is appropriate and meaningful for people who are living now, rather than people who lived 100 years ago or who will live 100 years in the future.” It is a task “that every generation in every culture faces the question of “contemporary worship” (2013). It was a response to the need for a church that is relevant and meaningful way to the modern adherents.

The way the church is defined has great theological implication on its practice and the involvement of the people. Kimball stresses that “we can’t go to church because *we are* the church, that the “modern contemporary churches have become increasingly consumeristic and are having less impact” because the way we define and view *church* shapes “the culture and ethos” (2003, 91-92).

### **Emergent**

The current trend is moving towards redefining as was described in Acts. The church was not referred to a *place* rather than *the people who constituted* it. It brings us back to *how* Kittel has described it – the gathering of the people. The emphasis is placed on this term *missional* which attempts to deconstruct the current idea of church in order to reconstruct it in harmony with the book of Acts. “A postmodern worldview celebrates diversity” (Anderson 2001, 251) and this view is gaining traction among the emerging adults who seek personal involvement within the community of faith and society at large. They see faith as active and having impact on the world that we live in.

## Summary

The role of adherents within the community of faith is crucial as the construct of ecclesiology for the emerging adults. Active participation, rather than passive association, with the church is an essential ingredient for the emerging adults. Regardless the form – traditional, contemporary or emergent – the church should be “structured in harmony with the biblical understanding of the Church” so long as “the kinds of structures” employed “best serve the Church in its life and witness” (Synder 1977, 139).

Traditional churches can be vibrant with the active participation for the adherents in the mission of the church. It will have to revisit the way church is viewed which will impact the culture and ethos of the community of faith. The contemporary churches have to move away from a consumeristic approach in engaging the adherents, while the emergent should not shy away from church structure as if it is inherently evil. Switching from one end of the pendulum to the other end should be avoided.

The heart of the matter is that each form must “*intentionally* cultivate the dynamics that characterize a healthy movement” (Keller, 351) that will revitalize and propel it forward to engage the postmodern world and beyond. It calls for contextualized theological practices that best reflect the setting and culture, and in this context the urban Subang-Sunway setting. Emerging adults can be guided and given the room needed to explore within the context of the three forms of church (worship) while remaining true to biblical demands.

## Gap Analysis in Literature

Much has been written on the decline of youth and young adults in churches in the Western democracies. The spread and coverage began as early as in the seventies. However, there are few resources available on the attrition of emerging adults in the Asian church context. Many that have been reviewed have been written from the standpoint of the western experience (USA, Europe, Australia and New Zealand). Even when written by an Asian, it is within the context of the Asian (migrant and born) in a Western context. Various reactions and responses were observed in those contexts.

There is not a specific title on the attrition of emerging adults that is written on the Asian church context, and specifically, Malaysia. Perhaps, the gap could be the dissimilarities of the diversity in cultures and people group within Asia. It could be a cultural gap. That the attrition phenomenon is global did not mean the factors were the same. The gap such as how developed a country is, the per capita income, colonial experiences et cetera impact the country as a whole. While there were overlapping factors and reasons, the primary factors are urbanization and the e-media explosion. It has changed the way and speed information is obtained. The world has shrunk with more affordable air travel. The globe has become like a village, reachable in the shortest amount of time possible.

Even among the diverse religious communities, not much has been written on this particular phenomenon facing the Christian world. The largest populations of adherents to Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism are situated in Asia. Pew Research 2018 reveals declining religiosity among young adults who are significantly less likely to be affiliated with a religious group in forty-one of one hundred and six countries surveyed, with Japan and South Korea the only two countries in Asia impacted significantly. Noteworthy is these forty-one countries are developed and urbanized with significant high income per capita. It could be an economic gap that precipitates decline in religiosity among the emerging adults. Economic prosperity has enabled access to the information world through devices, with more highly educated younger generations having greater exposure to the outside world than the earlier generations. It can be observed that there is a close connection between urbanization and emerging adult attrition in churches in Malaysia.

In spite of the wealth of material on Christian discipleship, there is still an absence of material that is specific to the Malaysian perspective on the attrition of the emerging adults.

### **Review of the Chapter**

The literature review suggests that attrition of emerging adults has been greatly impacted by rapid urbanization taking place, and has reframed the Asian societies in various degrees. Malaysia has not been spared of this phenomenon too.

The post-modern world that emerging adults are living in and growing up into adulthood poses new challenges to the question of living faith. The constant factor fueling the attrition of emerging adults in the church globally is the urban factor, regardless in a developed or developing country. As long as the church is situated in an urban environment, the likelihood of a recurring phenomenon is great.

The next chapter will deal with the methodology approach to obtain the data on the phenomenon in the AG church, to explore why emerging adults leave or stay, and how stakeholders respond.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

This research employs a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. The methodology is divided into two main sections. The first major section addressed the question, “Why do emerging adults leave or remain in the church and the contributing factors?” In exploring this question, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The findings on this question will be discussed in Chapter Four. The second section addressed the question of “How the stakeholders of AG church respond?” Findings on this question will be discussed in Chapter Five.

#### Research Design Map

For the purpose of this research, the targeted participants fall within the range of nineteen and twenty-nine, also known as the *emerging adult* phase. Malaysia classifies youth from ages between fifteen to thirty years old. The “data collection begins with setting the boundaries for the study; it continues by collecting information through observations, interviews, documents, and visual materials” to reach the conclusion “by establishing the protocol for recording the information” (Sensing, 91). The veracity and validity of the data quality recorded are intended.

In order to do so, an online survey covering six AG churches which represents 75% of total AG churches in this area, focus group with one church each from Sunway and Subang respectively. Fifty percent of these six AG churches have distinct fellowship groups for youth and young adult, which overlaps in the age range under Malaysia’s youth classification.

Five personal interviews with three senior pastors of Sunway – Subang churches, the Youth Alive national director, and the president of the AG Bible College of Malaysia were planned. Sunway – Subang falls under the jurisdiction of the CDC with a total of eight AG churches. BCM is also situated in the CDC, and serves as the national training institute for AG Malaysia. By *triangulating* the multiple data-collection to crosscheck the data “provides breadth and depth” analysis, thus increasing the trustworthiness of this research (Sensing 72).

For the first section, the following data collection methods were employed:

1) A quantitative survey questionnaire consisting of twenty-five questions for the emerging adults, targeted at six English-speaking AG churches in this area. The size of the congregations ranges from 50 – 400 in adherents. The questions were crafted to discover the reasons or contributing factors influencing their decision to move or stay. The online quantitative survey questionnaire covers the four groups of emerging adults i.e. those who remained in the church, those who have left, those who embraced other religion, and those who left the church but retained their faith.

2) Two *focus groups* consisting of four to five emerging adults formed to pursue a deeper conversation with the emerging adults. Of the six churches, two churches were studied – one each from Sunway and Subang. The qualitative focus group pursue a deeper conversation with the emerging adults in understanding *why* they remain or leave. Their personal experiences and perception of the church, faith and spirituality are important to find out their *reality*, not what I perceive as a pastor. It will give a good starting point in identifying what is working, and address what is not. I am shifting from a position of *prescribing* and embracing *engagement* in order to formulate an approach helpful to aid youth navigate emerging adulthood phase better, with the hope of strengthening faith and facilitating their spiritual identity and experience.

The first section with its findings will be dealt with more comprehensively in chapter 4.

For the second section, these were the methods employed:

(1) An *Archival* survey of available data at the General Council of the AG Malaysia was done to ascertain the population of emerging adults in the Central District Council of the AG Malaysia. It also surveyed what programme had been initiated in the AG church throughout the last twenty years in engaging the youth and young adults. It gave insights on whether it was effective and helpful in engaging the targeted constituent in the AG churches. An examination of past and present initiatives of AG Malaysia will provide some understanding on the effectiveness of programme and approach employed.

(2) *Personal interviews* with three senior pastors, president of the Bible College of Malaysia (national bible college of the AG Malaysia) and the Director for the Youth

Alive of the AG Malaysia were carried out. It sought to understand what approaches did the stakeholders take in engaging the emerging adults and their effectiveness. This gives an idea how the stakeholders of the AG church responded. The rationale is that inevitably, national initiatives do influence local churches in the ministry approach and planning. This means that the six AG churches targeted in this research would draw resources and streamline their ministry to the youth and young adults to the national agenda.

These conversations, past and present are needful to formulate an approach and measure the AG churches need to take in relation to discoveries in question one. Past and present initiatives are examined to identify what to refine, remove, reinvent and / or reintroduce helpful to the present context, with a view to the future implication in establishing the emerging adults in the church and the Christian faith. An honest enquiry will help identify the weaknesses and strength of our churches, and to institute change needful in order to effectively address attrition issue. Learning from the experiences of others who are doing well in this aspect, insights from the past to the present initiatives – for instance the setting up of national youth department, the training of past, current, and future ministers working among the youth and emerging adults – can increase our awareness and identify their effectiveness and contributions as we work towards a discipleship approach for the local church.

The second section with its findings will be dealt with in Chapter 5 more comprehensively.

#### Data Collection Process for First Section

The data collection process included identifying the participants from the six churches, two case study churches (one in Subang, one in Sunway), obtaining permission from their respective pastors and participants. The questions were crafted to gain insight by employing a survey via electronic media and semi-structured interviews with selected participants listed above. Interviews were done via Zoom in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic and restricted movement order. Focus groups of four to five emerging adults (depending on the availability of participants) were conducted with groups gathered in their respective church premise or an agreed location where they can safely gather in line with health operating guidelines. The plan was to have two focus groups with age

range of 19 – 24 and 25 – 29, from these two churches. However, this was not available, so the focus group age range was from 19 – 29, with between four to six members.

The segregation into smaller units in age range is helpful since their maturity and life experiences will differ. The younger segment consists of mostly emerging adults transiting from public or private schools into colleges and tertiary education. Those in the older segment are transiting into adulthood, and mostly in the employment market. Their makeup and mindset tend to differ and change overtime.

### Data Collection Process for Second Section

The interviews with the senior pastor and pastor of these churches, as well as the YA Director and the BCM President were scheduled and appointments confirmed. These “interviews allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the researcher by observation” (Sensing, 103). These participants are selected in tandem with their direct involvement with the targeted group either at the local church and national levels.

Five interviews were conducted with key stake-holders. Three were senior pastors of the six churches in Sunway - Subang. The views of senior pastors were sought to understand their concerns and thoughts in engaging and discipling the emerging adults in their churches. Of the three senior pastors, two were from the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 - 1964), and one from the millennial generation (born between 1981 - 1996). Their views added varying nuances to their approach and perception of the phenomenon. The purpose of the personal interviews was to gain insights on the philosophy and approach employed by the church in discipling the youth and young adults. Tapping into the conversations at the local church level was important to understand the struggles, challenges and approach taken to address the attrition of the emerging adults in our AG churches.

At the national level, two personal interviews were conducted via Zoom. Firstly, the view of the president of BCM in the training of ministers, in particular the segment that work among the youth and emerging adults, the curriculum and emphasis was sought to

understand the correlation of training ministers in line with the concerns and needs of the field. The insights through a personal interview on the philosophy and approach employed by the Bible College of Malaysia in training personnel for full time ministry adds another facet to the conversation in training and reaching the emerging adults in our churches and work-places. Many of the BCM students fall within the bracket of young adults, and the role of our national Bible College is crucial especially with the close connectedness with the local church.

Secondly, the Youth Alive Director's perception and strategy in empowering and mentoring youth workers and pastors added valuable insights to the overall conversation in addressing and meeting the needs of emerging adults in the AG churches. The insights through personal interview on the philosophy and approach employed by the National Youth Alive department in engaging and developing the youth in Assemblies of God of Malaysia adds a deeper dimension to frame the psyche of emerging adult leaders, workers and pastors working among this segment. Many of these youth fall within the bracket of young adults, and the role of our national Youth Alive is crucial working closely with the local church.

The *triangulation* of the four groups of participants will cover the perceptions and views of key stakeholders, namely, the emerging adults, the senior pastors, the national youth leadership, and national training institution. The data collected will shed light from varied angles on this research focus.

#### Duration

Three months were allocated from January to March 2021 for the field research work. However, it was completed over within two months in January and February 2021. Four levels of field research were conducted: archival research of the AG Malaysia on emerging adult demographic and programme, an online survey questionnaire of thirty-five, five semi-structures personal interview sessions, and two focus groups from two churches in Sunway and Subang respectively.

## Profile of Participants

How were the participants selected to participate in this research? The basic criterion for selection was the context of the research. The AG churches in Sunway-Subang formed a *biopic* representation of what I have observed in our AG churches in the urban environment. It gives a generic representation of the issue we face in AG Malaysia. I must acknowledge that every region, every church is unique in some aspect. However, it must be noted that my conversations with district and national leaders do support this observation. I am currently serving my fifth term as the Central District Council (CDC) Superintendent. As such, I have access to pastors and ground knowledge of churches in my district under my purview.

Why is Sunway – Subang, Malaysia selected? Two key factors: Firstly, it is situated in the most developed state in Malaysia, Selangor. The estimated population of Malaysia in 2020 was 32.58 million. It was composed of 60.4% Bumiputera, 26.4% Chinese, 12.3% Indians and 0.9% others. Selangor has a population of 6.52 million and is the most populous state (Dept of Statistics 2020). “The state of Selangor has the largest economy in terms of gross domestic product” and “is the most developed state in Malaysia” (Wikipedia 2022). It would be a fair representation of the most urbanized setting nationally. From the literature review, the biggest impact and challenge to the church is the process of urbanization. It has altered the perception on spirituality and the view of the traditional church, the *institutional church*.

Secondly, I am pastoring a church in this specific environment. I am an interested party – *participant as observer* - seeking to develop an approach to disciple the youth transiting into adulthood, the phase of emerging adulthood. I have observed and personally experience loss of emerging adults in transition. I am seeking to understand *what* factors contribute to what I describe as a good transition, when a youth continues into adulthood, and remains in the church. Not only that, I am interested in their continue participation in the local church. The common term used in AG circle is *servng* in the ministries within the church. I am interested in knowing *why* they decide to stay in the church or if they have considered leaving.

These youth are in the midst of transition – in the emerging adult phase. It cannot be said that Asia is in a post-modern post-Christian world as the largest adherents to

Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are in Asia. Barna identifies countries like India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan as *multi-faith* contexts as they do not have large Christian presence (Barna 2019, 14). But it can be described as a post-modern world that emerging adults in Asia are living in, along with its effects. This conversation will be valuable to my understanding in relation to the world of the emerging adults in Sunway-Subang.

The first group of participants is the emerging adults in these six English-speaking churches. A survey is done electronically to obtain specific data on their experience as an individual transiting from youth to adulthood, and challenges that they experienced navigating this transition. It will help identify factors that contributed to their decision to remain or move in their church settings. These group can be a mixed of first generation or subsequent generation Christians. It is designed “to describe characteristics or understandings of a large group of people” (Sensing 2011, 115).

A case study on two churches will be employed. They are “learning tools that present stories of actual events and dilemmas faced by real people” (Sensing, 141). Each church will have a focus group will be formed from two churches – one each from Sunway and Subang environment. These two groups would also participate in the survey, before inducting them into the focus group. The synergy from focus group can “provide richer data than if each one person in the group had been interviewed separately” with their interaction and discussion on “a particular theme imposed by a researcher” (Sensing, 120). These emerging adult participants will be selected based on the recommendation of their leader or pastor on an informed consent basis.

### Online Survey

The first group is the emerging adults in these churches in Sunway-Subang. By employing an online survey, the hope was to derive a general understanding on their faith and experience as they transit from youth to adulthood – the phase of emerging adult. The commonality is that these emerging adults are in churches that are largely in urbanized areas. The dissimilarity is in the specific church culture that would differ for one another though they are AG churches. This can be expected and explained, as each church is independent and sovereign, which is a fundamental value in the AG fellowship. Churches are led in accordance to the pastoral leadership and vision, with

no two churches espousing identical values or vision. This is also true with those whose churches have started other *pioneer work* or new church plant. These *pioneer works* or church plants may differ from the *mother church* style of leadership and direction. It is very pastor-centric.

The online survey was carried out via Google document platform. Participants were invited through their church on a voluntary basis, and done anonymously. A link was made available to respective churches via an approved announcement template by the ethics committee. A total of sixty-one emerging adults responded for the six churches that were invited to participate. The average time needed to complete the questionnaire was ten minutes. It yielded some deeper insights on their perception on faith, church, and God.

The online survey was opened from two months from January to February 2021 to the six churches after obtaining the consent of the pastors for their voluntary involvement. Participants were required to complete an electronic survey via Google Document. These were individuals across AG Malaysia English speaking churches in Sunway - Subang environment from nineteen to twenty-nine years old who “were raised Christian” and/or attended church monthly or more for at least a year as a youth. The purpose was to identify their perception of God, the church, and their faith.

The responses from the six churches targeted was satisfactory as sixty-one respondents for the online survey was within the range of between fifty to seventy emerging adult responses to gain some level of saturation in data responses. It was estimated that the combined emerging adult population in these six churches does not exceed two hundred. This was based on the replies from the respective senior pastors from these six churches. This represented a 30% of that segment which is a good representation.

### Focus Group

From the online survey, a specific number of participants are selected from two churches to form the *focus group*. The use of focus group would be helpful to gain specific perceptions of the emerging adults on their faith and their church. Their responses to a series of question “allows the researcher to quickly gather data from several points of view” (Sensing, 120). Their common experience in a specific of the

local church setting allows me the gain better understanding and insights of their spiritual experiences and faith formation. The group experience in comparison to another group will offer some comparison and observation under different pastoral leadership. The observation I have thus far is that our AG churches in the CDC have similar experiences of attrition among the emerging adults. There are a few exceptions though, but it is in a different environment and church size that exceeds five hundred members.

Two focus groups from two selected churches, one each from Sunway and Subang were formed. The two groups consist of volunteers that were consented by the senior pastors. Their participations were on voluntary basis. Two focus groups of between four and six were scheduled zoom meeting at an appointed date and time since the pandemic restricted the option to meet physically face-to-face. Focus groups will be coded as FG#01-02. One group was recruited from a church in Subang. Five volunteered consisting of four male and one female. However, on the day of the session, four were present in the zoom meeting, while one male did not login. It was still within the expected participation of between four to six emerging adults per focus group. The second focus group was recruited from a church in Sunway. It consists of six individuals, with equal representation from both genders. The duration taken was between one hundred and fifty-seven to one hundred and fifty-nine minutes for the two sessions. It was conducted on two different occasions at night as it was the most suitable time for the emerging adults. The composition of both groups involved their leaders and members in the respective churches.

### Instrumentations

Ethical clearance is first to be obtained before the participants in the churches and national department and institution are approached. The express approval of the ethical committee would be sought with the proposed survey questions, focus group questions, and personal interviews content to be asked in each respective activity.

Once this step has been cleared, the next step is to contact the six churches in Sunway-Subang area. The senior pastors' expressed permission is sought before a request is made to identify the segment of constituent in the local church. The pastors are informed through letter emailed and details of the research's purpose and goals

communicated.

Once their consent, scanned electronically or written, has been obtained, a request is made to the pastors to identify the segment to participate in the general survey. Each participant will be asked at the onset of the survey their consent before they proceed to complete the survey. A deadline to complete the survey is given to the church to extend invitation to their emerging adults to participate. The time frame of the survey is time sensitive to the researcher as there is a deadline for the completion of this dissertation. The participation of as many emerging adults in respective churches is encouraged, with the list provided for by the respective church leaders. The confidentiality of each participant is maintained by assigning number to hide their names, and stored with the password-protected document access only by the researcher. However, participating churches are given a summary of the finding without disclosing the participants' responses to the survey or the focus group interaction. The data collected will be kept secure which may be useful for reference in future, subject to the rigors of data protection demands of the law.

Of the six churches, two will be used as case study, one each from Sunway (Glad Tidings Sunway, GTS) and Subang (Faith City Church, FCC). It must be noted that "most cases are not timeless and can quickly lose their relevance" (Sensing, 148), and therefore time sensitive. While I have observed a repeated pattern of attrition since my time as a youth in the church, each generation presents varying degrees of similarities and dissimilarities. The general survey can only yield certain basic data that cut across the emerging adult experience in their faith and church life. The case study on two churches "is relevant the more" as my "questions require an extensive and 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon" (Yin 2014, 49). I acknowledge that it will go a little deeper than the surface, to at least understanding factors and reasons behind their decision and actions. The case study on these two churches will "lend itself to in-depth analysis in a natural context using multiple sources of information" (Hancock & Algozzine 2006, 17).

Focus group for these two churches was done via Zoom on an agreed time and day. The number in the group is set between four to six depending on the size of the church, and consenting participants in the focus group. The question to be asked will consist of ten questions. The session will be for one-and-a-half hours to two hours session. The

instrument is a set of questions designed to obtain their perception, opinion and comments that determine their decision to remain in the church and their participation in the local church.

The whole process of data collection methods has a contextual focus. It examines the Sunway-Subang experience related to the attrition of emerging adults in our church. “Documents such as field notes, verbatim, transcriptions, and interview data all need to be unpacked and analyzed” (Sensing, 196). Themes and the common trend will emerge to provide valuable insights and learnings.

### Variables

“A variable refers to a characteristic or attribute of an individual or an organization that can be measured or observed and that varies among the people or organization being studied” (Creswell 2014, 83). The sample size is on the six churches, which varies in their congregation sizes. It is also assumed that every church has its own vision, value, and culture. It would be expected that questionnaire and focus group may yield varying data as individual respond to questions. The similarities and dissimilarities would give me a deeper insight into what emerging adults consider as important, helpful, or repulsive in their faith experience in the church as they go through age segment transitions i.e., children to youth, youth to emerging adulthood. Their individual and collective experience expressed would be invaluable for my research, and in crafting a discipleship approach. On this score, their perceptions, experiences, comments, and stories must be viewed subjectively. The bias of this researcher cannot be ruled out, that the interpretation of the data would have a mix of objective and subjective elements.

The second variable is the lack of resources specific to the scope of my research. While there are limited Asian titles, there is not one that I have come across dealing with the attrition of emerging adults in Malaysian churches vis-à-vis AG Malaysia. The data to be obtained would be subjective and personal, and any baseline would be the commonalities that have been identified in past research worldwide. It would be assumed that these raw data can contribute further understanding to the changing societal impacts and worldview of the emerging adults. In the literature review, it was highlighted by Pew Research, only two of the forty-one countries surveyed in Asia,

Japan and South Korea, reflected similar downward trend impacts like their Western counterpart in terms of religiosity.

A third variable from these six churches is their congregation sizes. The range is from fifty to four hundred in congregation numbers. A smaller size can mean a closeness that is different from one that is four hundred strong.

The fourth variable is their history. The range of their history is between fifteen to fifty years. The changes that have taken place in the life of the church and the subsequent generations in these congregations. It would be assumed that within these churches, there are embedded theological practices that differ from each other, though they are essentially AG churches in DNA. Church context, pastoral leadership style, et cetera play an important role in the experiences of the emerging adults. I anticipate some similarities and uniqueness as a direct outflow from it.

Finally, at the time of the research, the world has been hit with an unprecedented worldwide emergency with the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic. The nations have not experienced the magnitude of its impact in history where travel, education, trade et cetera were so evident. Recent research by three Italian researchers revealed that the tremendous psychological consequence came as a result of the prolonged lockdown and social distancing protocols. Their findings revealed that:

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population. Research has highlighted the impact on psychological well-being of the most exposed groups, including children, college students, and health workers, who are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and other symptoms of distress. (Saladino, Algeri and Aurlemma 2020)

Churches world over, Malaysia included, are experiencing the impact of Covid-19 pandemic within their congregations. As more and more churches establish a new *norm* of church expression, the online presence has become inevitable and needful. What is observable within my own congregation, and as communicated by pastors in my CDC district, the church physical attendance registered a drop of between 30% to 50% in physical attendance. This is a variable unthinkable in the past, but a present reality in 2020.

It should be noted that this research is done in English, with the medium of instruction and conversation conducted entirely in English among predominant English-speaking churches. It should be noted that most Malaysians are fluent in at least three languages, English, Bahasa Malaysia and a Chinese or India dialect. Most have a fair command both in written and spoken English and Bahasa Malaysia. The Chinese or Indian dialect is mainly spoken, unless they have undergone at least six years of vernacular primary education.

### Procedure for Data Collection

It should be stated that my role as a researcher is a *participant as observer* because the subjects and I “are aware of the fact that it is a fieldwork relationship” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, 294). My church, Glad Tidings Sunway and Faith City Church, are two churches providing the focus group representing Sunway and Subang respective. The data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using document analysis. Documents like “field notes, verbatim, transcriptions, and interview data” will be organized, read and check “multiple time on different occasions.” The data will be organized to “areas of agreement and disagreement,” looking for “areas of significant overlap as themes or patterns” (Sensing, 196) and noting common phrases.

The questionnaire used centres on the experience of the emerging adults in their churches, identifying what were the contributing factors or reasons for their decision to stay or consider leaving the church. This will give a baseline data to pursue in the focus group interview. Ten questions will be used to facilitate the focus group to hear their stories and comments as they respond to the questions posed. I am aware that the narrative can be dominated by a participant and the group dynamics within the group affected, and facilitation may be needed to guide the discussion.

The areas I would like to concentrate the initial probes will firstly be on, how do the participants view their church in this postmodern world. Secondly, how they view their faith and how would they describe their Christian faith. Thirdly, what were the factors and reasons that either reinforced or eroded their faith development. Fourthly, do the family i.e., father, mother, siblings et cetera play an important and integral role in nurturing faith formation and development. Fifthly, does the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit impact their lives as believers. And lastly, is there continuity of faith

from youth into emerging adulthood.

### Procedure for Data Analysis

The evaluation methodology, as Sensing describes it, “will produce the data to answer the questions and fulfill the objectives” (19). This research employs a mixed methods design that incorporates a brief statistical survey to determine the size of the emerging adults in the district, with special attention to the Sunway – Subang environment. This will give an indicative ratio to the demographical constituency of emerging adult population in the AG churches. From previous statistics, the overall reporting by churches does not exceed 40% of the national AG churches. As such, final figures are best estimates based on known average attendance in our churches.

The data will be organized and coded. It will be appended as Appendix A for the general questionnaire, Appendix B for the focus group, Appendix C for the personal interviews (via Zoom, and where possible, face-to-face). The coding yielded some observable themes, and what is common. Since the size of Sunway – Subang consist of six churches, the total adherents were between six hundred to one thousand in total of English-speaking membership. What has been observed is the emerging adults in these churches do not form more than 25% of the congregation. This would mean there are a total one hundred and fifty to two hundred emerging adults in these six churches. In order to achieve a high level of confidence in the sampling size, I am working with the following formula from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (581):

$$N = p\% \times q\% \times [z/e\%]^2$$

where

$n$  is the minimum sample size required

$p\%$  is the proportion belonging to the specified category

$q\%$  is the proportion not belonging to the specified category

$z$  is the  $z$  value corresponding to the level of confidence required (see Table)

$e\%$  is the margin of error required.

Table: Levels of confidence and associated  $z$  values

Level of confidence	$z$ value
90% certain	1.65
95% certain	1.96
99% certain	2.57

Since I am looking at a 90% certain for level of confidence, the sampling size of the emerging adults would be four ( $150 \times 0.027225$ ) to six ( $200 \times 0.027225$ ). However, I am looking at participation level of between fifty to seventy-five emerging adult responses to the questionnaire to gain some level of saturation in data responses. This is doable number considering the interest expressed when I made a general survey among these churches on my research topic on the attrition of emerging adults in our AG churches.

### Review of the Chapter

The field research was designed to derive a deeper understanding on the factors and reasons that contributed to either the pull or push factor for the emerging adults to remain or leave their churches. The approach of prescribing direction and what to do cannot fully engage them in a postmodern environment. The questionnaire and focus group were intended to engage them to speak their thoughts, without the fear, stigma or condemnation by the church. It was an earnest attempt to listen to understand their frame of reference, their perception of faith and its relevance as they go through transition. This transition is not a small jump. It opens them to a new world of ideas and challenges. How do they navigate without shipwrecking their faith since the church is no longer viewed as the authoritative voice amid competing voices that assail long held teachings and values in a Christian environment of the home and church?

As a *participant-observer*, it has been a personal quest of more than thirty years to address an observation that began when I was in the youth fellowship of the church. If we keep losing our youth in transition during emerging adulthood phase, the church will be deprived of human resource to reach the next generation. The insights to be gained

will be invaluable to formulate an approach to disciple the emerging adults, with a bias to reinforce their presence in the local church. Should this not be the outcome, the least to expect is that they keep their faith and express it in a shape congruent with biblical standards and norms.

At a deeper level, my wish is that more research will be done on emerging adults in the Asian context. More can be done to engage them in a meaningful way, and at the same time, nurturing their faith to be that of what Powell and Clark described in their book, *Sticky Faith* (2011).

## **CHAPTER 4: WHY DO EMERGING ADULTS LEAVE OR REMAIN IN THE CHURCH AND THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS?**

This chapter consists of the findings from the online survey and two focus groups.

The online survey was to obtain their:

- Perception of the church, faith, and God
- Understanding of Christian beliefs
- Religious practices
- Religious experiences growing up
- Spirituality and faith

The focus groups were formed from respondents who have participated in the online survey, based upon the recommendation of their respective senior pastors. It was designed to gain a deeper understanding through three leading questions listed below:

- What was their perception of the church?
- What contributed to their decision to stay or consider leaving?
- What reinforced or eroded their faith development?

### **Insights from the Findings**

#### Online Survey

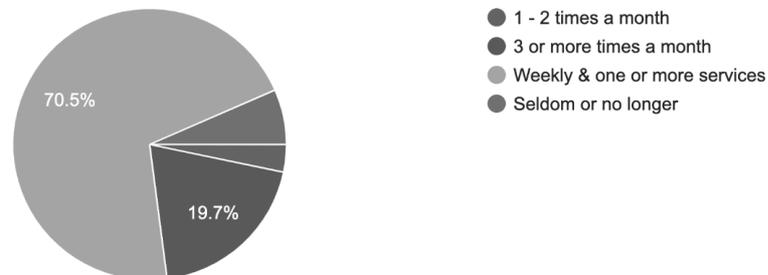
The findings are based on the sixty-one online survey responses received. These are participants opened to the six churches in Sunway - Subang area. Thirty-two or 52.5% are female, while twenty-nine or 47.5% are male. Ten or 16.4% are first generation Christian whose parents are non-Christian; twenty-eight or 45.9% are second generation Christian (at least one of the parents is a Christian, and twenty-three or 37.7% are third generation Christian (at least one of the parents and one of the grandparents are Christian).

On faith and church participation, forty-three or 70.5% go to church weekly and one or more services. Twelve or 19.7% go to church three or more times a month, with 3.3%

or two going once or twice a month, and 6.6% or four seldom or no longer attend church (see Chart G06).

G06. Tell me about your church participation. How often do you go to church?

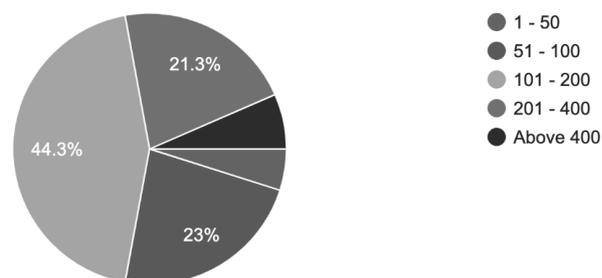
61 responses



These participants come from varying church congregation sizes. Twenty-seven or 44.3% attend a church of between one hundred and one to two hundred strong. This was inclusive of children, youth and adults. Fourteen or 23% attend a church which has a congregation size of between fifty-one and one hundred, while thirteen or 21.3% attend a church with a congregation size of between two hundred and one to four hundred. Four or 6.6% attend a church with a congregation size of above four hundred, and three or 4.9% attend a church of between one to fifty (see Chart G07).

G07. Tell me about the size of the congregation of the church you are attending (or attended growing up). (This is inclusive of children, youth & adults)

61 responses



The data is a good reflection of a mixed experiences of varying church congregation sizes. Church size can impact their faith experience and closeness with each other. The bigger the church is, the less personal in terms of bonding and closeness as a church and vice-versa.

## Perception of God, Church and Faith

The perception of the emerging adults on God, the church, and the faith is crucial to understand their decision to remain or leave church. It contributes enormously as contributing factors which can help formulate discipleship approach that is meaningful and effective.

### Perception of God

Based on the present perception of faith in God (see Chart G08a), there were six high points (exceeding 50%) in their experience of faith in God. Fifty or 82% experienced closeness with God; forty-eight or 78.7% believe that Jesus is the only way to God (exclusive); forty-seven or 77% pray to God, and know that God plays a big role in their lives; and forty-one or 67.2% have memories of experiencing God. Thirty-six emerging adults or 59% talk about their faith to others. These are indicative that their experiences with God were personal, positive and memorable to share with others.

On the other hand, twelve or 19.7% do not have a good understanding of their faith. This is reinforced by the idea that eight or 13.1% felt that good works was needed for salvation, while eleven or 18% felt lost about their faith.

When asked to indicate three from the list closest to their present perception, there was an average drop of 25% from the six high points recorded (see Chart G08b).

The corresponding drop is reflected below (see *Table 2*). There is a significant change in their perception of God ranging from 16.3% to 39.3%.

	General Perception of God		Present Perception of God	
<b>Experienced closeness with God</b>	82%	50	45.9%	28
<b>Believe that Jesus is the only way to God (exclusive)</b>	78.7%	47	49.2%	30
<b>Pray to God</b>	77%	47	50.8%	31
<b>God plays a big role in their lives</b>	77%	47	60.7%	37

<b>Memories of experiencing God</b>	67.2%	41	27.9%	17
<b>Talk about their faith to others</b>	59%	36	19.7%	12

### Perception of Faith

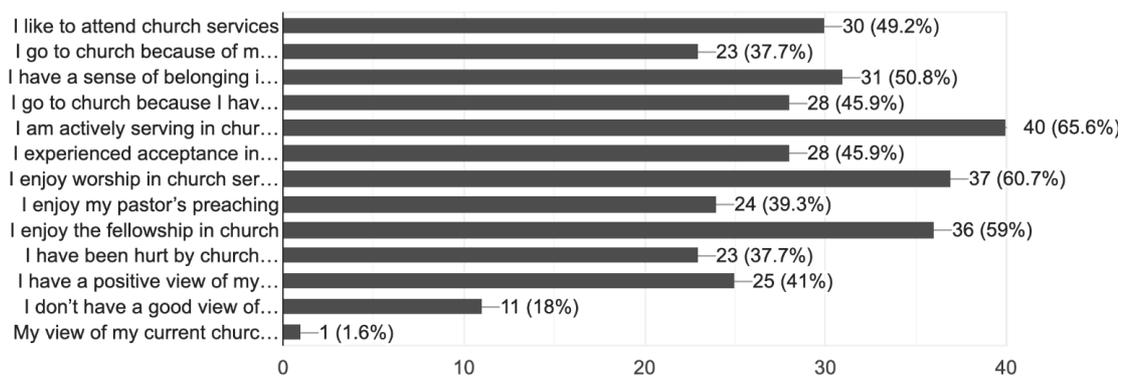
Twelve or 19.7% felt that they did not have a good understanding of their faith, while eleven or 18% felt lost about their faith. Eight or 13.1% felt that good work is needful for their salvation, while six or 9.8% were unsure if they are a Christian. Two or 3.3% think that there are other ways to know God (Christianity is not exclusive). One each (3.3%) no longer ascribing to the Christian faith, and does not believe there is a God due to the lack of rational evidence. While these represented a small fraction, it is still a concern as their understanding of salvation and faith were deficient. Over time, it may lead to loss of faith or abandoning their Christian faith.

### Perception of Church

On their perception of the church, there were four high points in their experiences with the church (see Chart G09a). Forty or 65.6% are actively serving in the church as a volunteer. Thirty-seven or 60.7% enjoy worship in church services, while thirty-six or 59% enjoy the fellowship in church. Thirty-one or 50.8% felt a sense of belonging in church.

G09a. Which statements below reflect your perception of your church? You may tick more than one item. You may tick more than one item.

61 responses

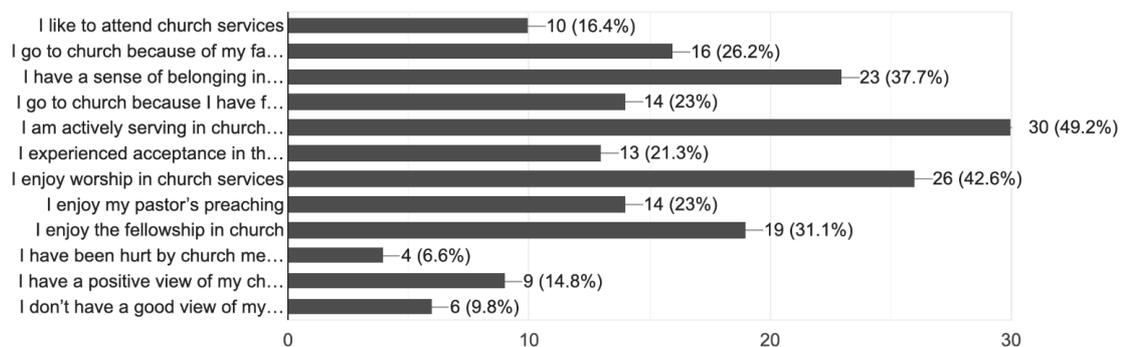


There is a range of positive experiences in the church of between 37.7% to 49.2%

responses. Some say that they like to attend church services (thirty or 49.2%); they attend church because of family (twenty-three or 37.7%), they have friends there (twenty-eight or 45.9%), they felt acceptance (twenty-eight or 45.9%), they enjoy the pastor’s preaching (twenty-four or 39.3%), and that they have a positive view of the church (twenty-five or 41%).

On the downside, twenty-three or 37.7% reported that they had been hurt by church members, and eleven or 18% do not have a good view of their church. When they were asked to indicated three items from their list closest to their present perception of the church, again there was a significant decline of the four high points (see Chart G09b).

G09b. Please indicate up to 3 from your list (G09a) closest to your present perception by a tick.  
61 responses



A comparison between the two reveals a general decline of between 13.1% to 27.9%

	General Perception of Church		Present Perception of Church	
<b>Actively serving in the church as a volunteer</b>	65.6%	40	49.2%	30
<b>Enjoy worship in church services</b>	60.7%	37	42.6%	26
<b>Enjoy the fellowship in church</b>	59%	36	31.1%	19
<b>A sense of belonging in church</b>	50.8%	31	37.7%	23

This may or may not translate to their decision or action later to stay or leave, but it should be noted that a good mechanism to help members address their not-so-good

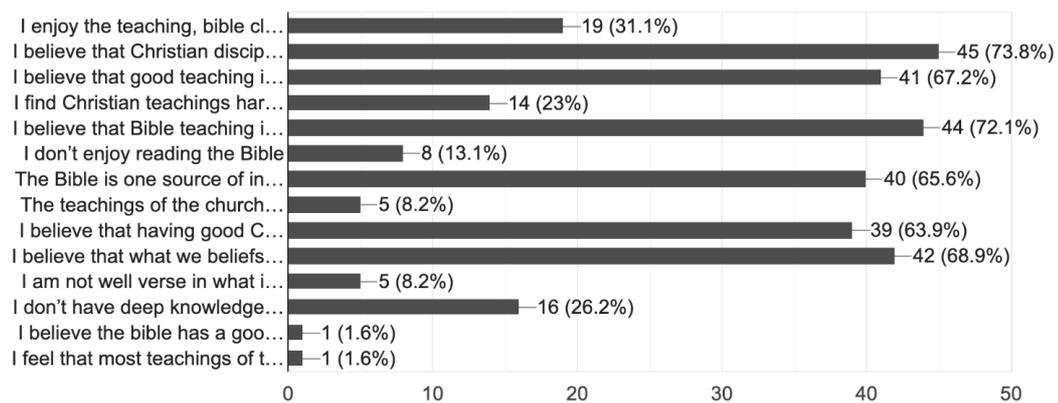
experiences be in place. “Our family, friends, community and the experiences we have had all contribute to our sense of who we are and how we view the world” (Dept. Of Education and Training, NSW, 2009).

### Understanding on Christian Beliefs

It has been said that our beliefs affect how we interact and live. This is true also with our Christian beliefs which inevitably affect our faith and practice. In the only survey, the emerging adults were asked about their understanding of their Christian beliefs (see Chart G10a).

G10a. Which statements below reflect your understanding of Christian beliefs? You may tick more than one item. You may tick more than one item.

61 responses

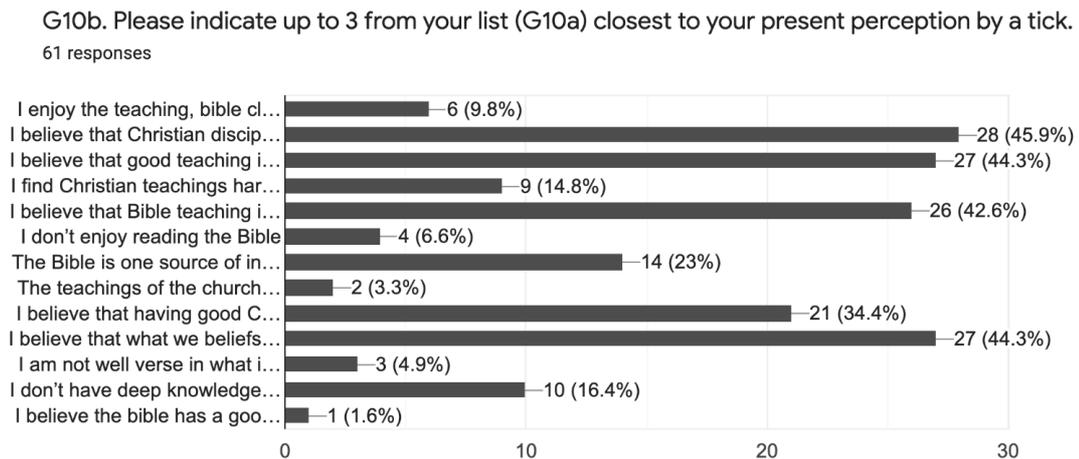


There were six high points registered in their responses. Forty-five or 73.8% believe that Christian discipleship is important in their lives. Forty-four or 72.1% felt that Bible teaching is important to nurture spiritual development. Forty-two or 68.9% affirm that their beliefs lead to how they live. Forty-one or 67.2% believe that good teaching is needful for faith development, with 65.6% agreeing that the Bible is one source of information to know God. 63.9% agree that having good Christian beliefs is foundational to faith. It is noteworthy that discipleship should be closely linked with biblical teaching to nurture spiritual growth and faith among the emerging adults.

Sixteen emerging adults or 26.2% felt that they did not have deep knowledge of the Bible. Fourteen or 23% felt that Christian teachings hard to apply, while eight or 13.1% did not enjoy reading the Bible. Five or 8.2% say that the teachings of the church as not

relevant for today, and that they were not well versed in their Christian beliefs. One or 1.6% felt that most of the teachings of the church are not relevant for today as it does not deal with end times, sexual impurity et cetera.

When they were asked to indicate three closest present perceptions of their understanding of their Christian beliefs, again there was a marked decline (see Chart G10b).



A comparison of the six high points in *Table 4* reveals a worrying trends of the eroding understanding of their Christian beliefs. There was a significant shift of between 22.9% to 42.6% in their present understanding of Christian beliefs. What has significantly caused the erosion their understanding? Perhaps, the ease of accessibility to an enormous information on the internet, and the postmodern world that has become

	General Understanding of Christian Beliefs		Present Understanding of Christian Beliefs	
<b>Christian discipleship is important in their lives</b>	73.8%	45	45.9%	28
<b>Bible teaching is important to nurture spiritual development</b>	72.1%	44	42.6%	26
<b>Their beliefs lead to how they live</b>	68.9%	42	44.3%	27
<b>Good teaching is needful for faith development</b>	67.2%	41	44.3%	27
<b>Bible is one source of information to know God</b>	65.6%	40	23%	14

<b>Good Christian beliefs is foundational to faith</b>	63.9%	39	34.4%	21
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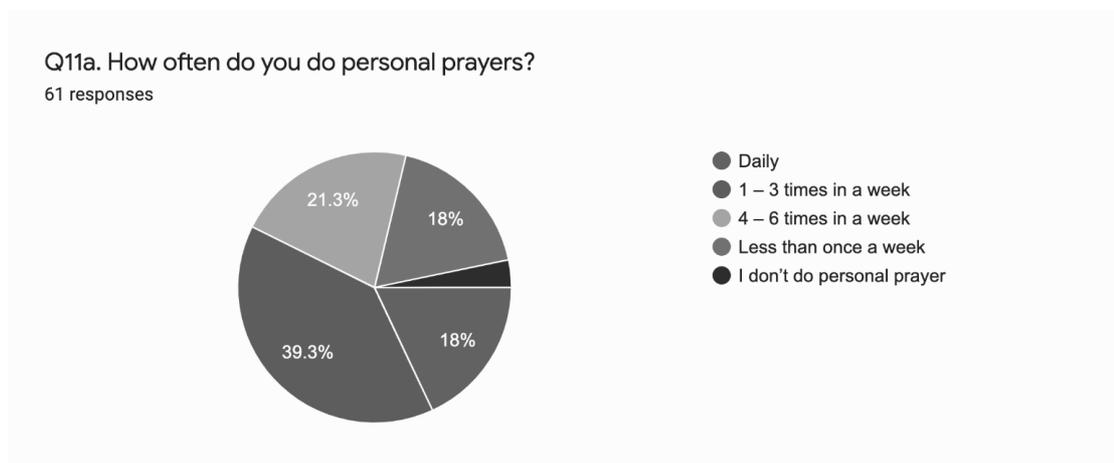
more tolerant and accepting of divergent ideologies and values have contributed to it. On an average, about 25% of respondents registered downside on their perception of God, church and faith. This represents a quarter of those surveyed who have some issues and concerns with their perception and experience of their faith. This should raise concern so that the gap does not increase overtime, resulting in further attrition of the generations of emerging adults.

### Religious Practices

The emerging adults were also surveyed on three aspects of their religious practices, namely personal prayer, Bible reading and devotional time.

#### Prayer

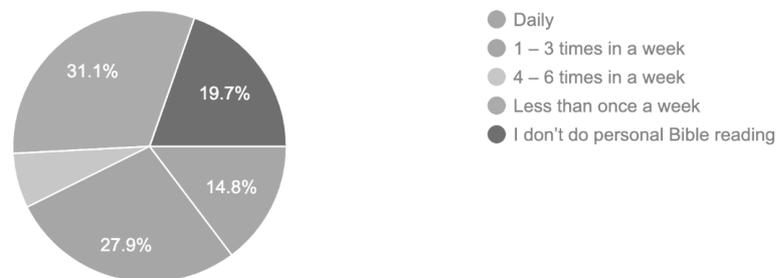
Eleven or 18% state that they pray daily, while thirteen or 21.3% say that they pray between four to six times in a week. Twenty-four or 39.3% revealed that they prayed between one to three times in a week. Another eleven or 18% pray less than once a week, with two or 3.3% not praying at all (see Chart Q11a). It seems that pray discipline is not the strength among the emerging adults. The question is how do we strategize and promote this spiritual discipline, given that less than 20% of members in a church attend prayer meeting in the AG churches in CDC averagely. The emerging adults are reflecting a wider concern of the mimicking the adults in their prayer life as reflected in prayer meeting attendance.



## Bible Reading

With reference to personal Bible reading habit, the emerging adults registered a lower percentage in this religious discipline (see Chart Q11b). Only nine or 14.8% read the Bible daily. Six point six percent or four do so between four to six times in a week, while seventeen or 27.9% do so between one to three times in a week. Nineteen or 31.1% read less than once in a week, with twelve or 19.7% not at all. While forty-four or 72.1% felt that Bible teaching is important to nurture spiritual development, this does not correspond with actual practice of doing so.

Q11b. Do you do personal Bible reading?  
61 responses



Developing a discipleship approach has to take into account an engagement to develop a Bible reading habit which is doable and interesting for the emerging adults. It must be emphasised that it should begin at the children age stage as a majority of them are the second and third generation Christian. The approach needs to integrate the faith formation and experience even at a veery young age. Each age gap transition is pivotal for faith transmission in accordance to the command, “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7a).

## Personal Devotion

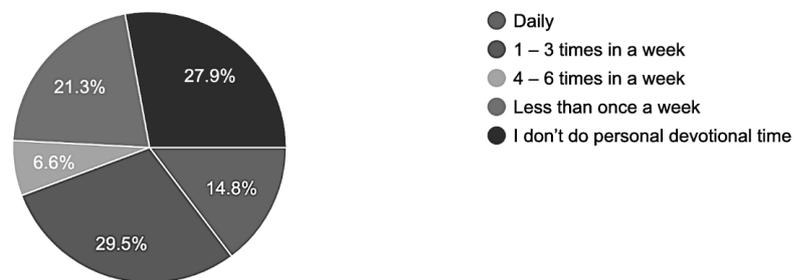
Growing up, a pivotal part of Christian living was the encouragement to develop a personal devotional time with God. The preaching and teaching on this were drummed into our lives constantly, and exemplified by the adults. In this postmodern, post-Cristian world, this is emphasised lesser and lesser in preaching and teachings. It is opined that the busyness of the present time provided the preaching and teachings. It is

opined that the busyness of the present time provided the excuse of its lack in teaching and practice.

Of the sixty-one responses, nine or 14.8% individuals maintain a daily personal devotional time. Only four or 6.6% do so between four to six times in a week, while eighteen or 29.5% do so between one to three times in a week. Thirteen or 21.3% say they do so less than once a week, and the remainder of 27.9%

Q11c. Do you do personal devotional time?

61 responses



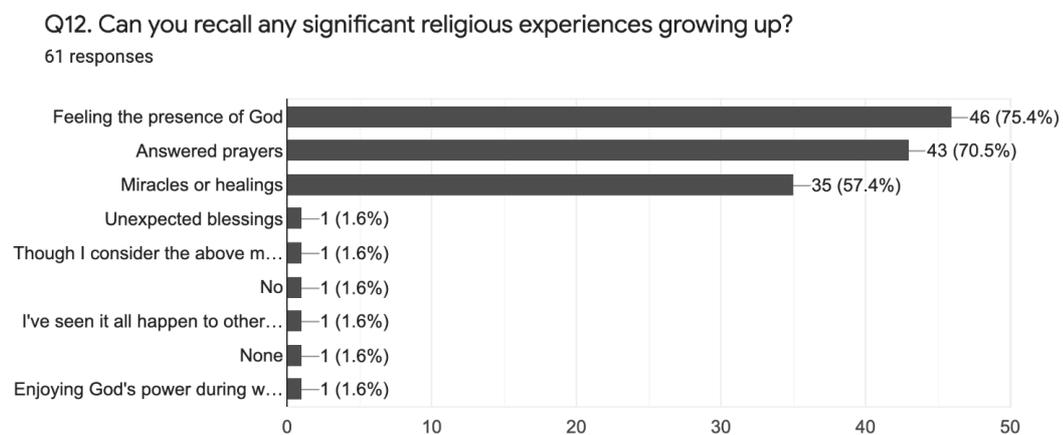
or seventeen not at all (see Chart Q11c). The setting of time aside to quiet down and do personal reflection is seemingly a lost art today. In the midst of busyness, an approach to disciple the emerging adults should encompass this aspect. Personal space to reflect and rest is needed so that a person can review and have pit-stops to recalibrate their lives. Making sense and evaluating their own lives in the context of their personal faith should not be segmented. Helping them relate and correlate with the career and personalize it as a whole is crucial for a holistic discipleship emphasis.

### Religious Experiences Growing Up

It was note-worthy that many of the emerging adults surveyed had significant religious experiences growing up. While it can be said that their faith is not like that of the first generation believers, it should in fact not be stated that it should not be. Nevertheless, their personal experiences must include their personal encounters in the journey of faith development and transmission. The temptation to evaluate and compare based on the benchmark of the first generation Christian should be avoided. Meaningful engagement

means that we identify the uniqueness of their experience as genuine and real, regardless the fact that they may not go through the hardships of those first generation Christian as they wrestle with family traditions and expectation common in ancestral worship.

There are three high points of their religious experiences growing up. Forty-six or 75.% state that they felt the presence of God. Forty-three or 70.5% say they had their prayers answered, while thirty-five or 57.4% experienced miracles or healings (see Chart Q12). These supernatural experiences file faith and trust in God. An important feature is the emphasis of the church, whether through preaching or teaching, to expect the divine intervention and to allow the tangible response at the altar. When people exercise their



faith tangibly by coming to the altar, and other lay hands in faith in prayer, these fuel faith. Faith formation has to be both taught and caught.

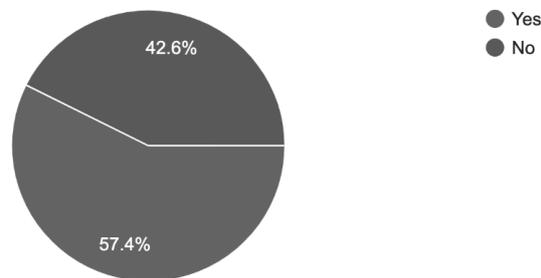
The dilemma of the emerging adults, amongst the second and third generation, is the conversion experience. Since they had grown up in a Christian home and environment, all that they have known and learn are Christian culture and values. Going to church, pray at meals et cetera are common experiences taken for granted. For the parents, unless there are intentional efforts to introduce faith and teach personal faith, a child can grow up as a *Christian* without having that transformative experience. Willard made this point very clear when he said “you can have a faith in Christ that brings forgiveness, while in every other respect your life is no different from that of others who have no faith in Christ at all” (2009, 36).

When asked about their conversion experience like an encounter with God, a kind of spiritual awakening, thirty-five or 57.4% responded affirmatively, twenty-six or 42.6% had not experienced that (see Chart Q13).

Some genuinely do not know and have considered themselves as “born-again” believers. Though they can pinpoint, they did confess what we term as the “sinner’s prayer” at some point in their growing years.

Q13. Have you experienced what some people use conversion to speak of an encounter with God, a kind of spiritual awakening?

61 responses

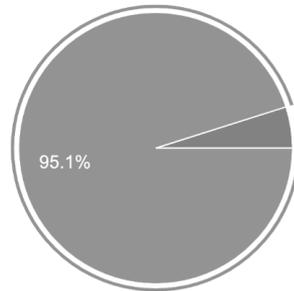


## Water Baptism

This can be correlated with some of their experiences with water baptism. Fifty-eight or 95.1% say they have been baptized, with three or 4.9% not done so (see Chart Q14a). When asked to describe their water baptism experience, there were fifty-two responses. The description reveals both depth of a spiritual experience with significance to a shallow understanding with no real attachment to it (see *Table 5: Water Baptism Experience*). It should be noted that a majority of these emerging adults grew up in church as second and third generation Christians. Water baptism was part and parcel of the Christian heritage. It seems that “for many, baptism remains in

Q14a. Have you experienced water baptism?

61 responses



- Yes. If yes, please describe it.
- No

the background, out of sight, whereas it should be the foundational event for all serious Christian living, all dying to sin and coming alive with Christ” (Wright 2008, 273).

**Table 5: Water Baptism Experience**

Significant	Neutral / Not Significant
In the church I grew up, after experiencing God	As it happened quite young, so nothing much particularly
It was a public declaration of faith	Cannot remember experience
Renewing	Was nothing special
Momentous. Declaring your faith to a crowd	The usual
The old me gone and the new me comes	Pastor pray and put me in the pool of water
Good, felt renewed	Ritualistic
A new beginning	Pastor baptised me in Fraser’s Hill
Eventful, overjoyed	Feeling a sense of relief
I was 12 years old and I made my own commitment to follow Jesus	It did not have much impact on my Christian life
Peace	It was calm
Had a lot of faith back then, with the anticipation to feel reborn upon doing so	It is okay
Baptised at age 13 knowing what it means, but hadn’t yet had a close experience with God	Normal
Did not feel anything extraordinary, but felt reassured and happy to commit to my faith	Cold and wet

It felt like a refresh / restart when I did it (like I made a choice) but it was also over very quickly	Don't remember
It felt like the beginning of a deeper relationship with God and it also felt refreshing and purifying	12 years old in church. Did as a ritual without understanding
Felt all the worries leave and felt renewed and clean to continue the next steps in my Christian journey with God	Calm
It was way back in 2004. I remember my parents told me that it was a serious decision and as I climbed into the pool, I remember the pastor reading a few Bible verses and prayed	It was very cold and I think being too young, you don't tend to grasp the significance of it as much as you should.
The preliminary course before baptism was helpful to build my foundational beliefs and confirm my understanding of the faith. This was followed by water baptism where we were immersed backwards after the pastor prayed for the individual	In my experience I couldn't appreciate it as much due to my young age (pre-school). It probably would be more significant if I were to take it when I'm older (15 age above)
Before being water baptised, I went through a series of lessons in understanding the importance of it. After I complete that, then only was I water baptised. During the baptism itself, I was asked if I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour and I answered yes (making a public declaration). Then I was baptised in the water.	When was 12, I remember that was the "passing" age to be able to be water baptised. I took some classes in church and was baptised in church.
I was first baptised as a baby (Anglican background) then baptised again as a teenager in my current church (Protestant). For me, my baptism was a public way of declaring the washing of my sins and becoming born again. It was only during those personal prayers, long nights just crying out to God and finally being able to form a relationship of trust in Him that I felt like a born-again Christian. That knowledge that I can always turn to Him, what He is to me, that is my definition of really being born again. To know that my actions in private would reflect that public action of a water baptism.	2-3 days encounter retreat prior (go to church, listen to teachings for half a day, go home kinda thing). Water baptism was "standard" (wait for your turn, get baptised, go shower).
It was new to me, I was from an Anglican background in my early childhood, I started to be exposed and accustomed to charismatic protestant teachings when I was around 8 years old and was water baptised in my late teens. I felt that it was important to do it but I think baptism in the Holy Spirit was more life changing for me personally.	I have my water baptism when I was quite young at that time I try to understand what water baptism is but now as an emerging adult I have clearer picture of what is it about than when I was younger
Feeling closer to God	Not a very remarkable experience
	Not very memorable as that time was still too young to understand water baptism
	At that time was a standard procedure once people reach a certain stage of life.

	Did it because it was expected of me but it did not change my life dramatically
	Was baptised in church on baptism week. Did it because mu mum allowed me to but don't really understand the significance of it.
	I was asked to profess my faith, prayed / declared upon, and sunk into the waters.
	I was pretty young when I had my water baptism, so in a way, it's just a memory.
	Did it the I was young, wasn't sure about my faith back then, but I just went with the flow
	Nothing special

### Baptism in the Holy Spirit

On the question of experiencing the baptism in the Holy Spirit, forty-eight or 78.7% have experienced it, while thirteen or 21.3% have yet to (see Chart Q15). Forty-one personal descriptions were registered. Thirty-five recorded positive memories of the event. Their description of the experience provided evidence of a deeper personal encounter that had greater significance than water baptism (see *Table 3: Baptism in the Holy Spirit experience*).

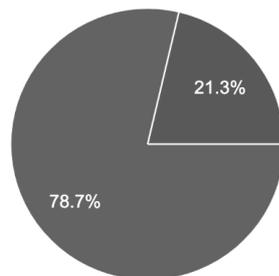
<b>Table 6: Baptism in the Holy Spirit Experience</b>	
<b>Significant</b>	<b>Neutral / Not Significant</b>
The presence of the Triune God is very much felt.	Cannot remember experience
It was after the first time I felt God's presence/sense of belonging in God	Unfamiliar
There's this warmth feeling that comes over you and it just takes over as you worship. At times, there's this feeling of calm and relief during hard situations, like God is assuring you that He is right there with you and you are not alone.	Not much immediate changes.

It was something I have always wondered about, I asked God many times but nothing would happen, when it did it was during an altar call session. I found myself speaking funny and strange words that I absolutely did not understand. I paused because I thought it was not making sense but through encouragement from my pastor and family I continued to pray in the spirit every day since and it has been an integral part in so many prayers, closeness with God and breakthroughs in my life even when I couldn't see what was happening.	Can't recall when.
Pastor prayed for me and I started speaking in tongues.	I was kid
It was an emotional and humbling experience that made me feel like I can communicate with the Holy Spirit and God directly.	Don't remember
Contrary to most describe experiences (feeling of cold/hot, uncontrollable laugh or spoke tongues). I was very aware of my surroundings and could stop 'speaking' the tongues.	Normal
Comforted and warm by God's presence	
I couldn't feel a dramatic change, like a sudden switch. But it was a gradual process of trusting and accepting God?	
Warmth	
Started speaking in tongues	
It was at a youth camp. Pastor was praying for us for the baptism in the Holy Spirit and I received it.	
Went to the altar for the baptism, when I opened my eyes, I was the last person at the altar	
I don't recall when in particular, but I can now speak in tongues.	
don't quite understand what baptism of the holy spirit is, but I can speak in tongues, have prophesied and had visions before	
Started speaking in tongues and was overwhelmed with a wave of tears	
Helps me with my relationship with God. I speak in tongues and can feel God's presence.	
Awakened my spirit, enthusiastic	
I was quite young but my parents were the ones who led me to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues	
Could feel the presence of God	
Through prayer & worship, the prayer in tongues comes naturally.	
My experience was mainly just following my parents do it. They spoke in tongues. There was a point where I have heard so much of it so it kinda naturally just came out of my mouth too.	

Interesting experience when I started to speak in tongue that I never experience that before.	
During Pastor Prayers with Speaking In Tongue	
I received it during my first year of Youth Camp and it came naturally when one of my leaders were praying for me. My body felt hot and I remember crying, then I realized I could speak in tongues.	
I felt my body as light as a feather	
Felt like mania. Wasn't sure if it was what I was supposed to do because I was immediately "fluent" in tongues.	
Tears and gratefulness	
Speaking in tongues	
I spoke in tongues, with the mindful goal of attempting to edify God's intervention whenever in prayer	
I was prayed for at a camp to receive the Holy Spirit. After a while, I started speaking in tongues in short sentences. Over time as I continue using and developing it, I could speak in tongues for longer periods of time and could effectively use it in prayer and when I worship (singing in tongues).	
received it during a personal encounter.	
It happened during youth camp.	
It was during a youth church camp and there was a guest pastor. We were praying and there was this warm feeling within me. We kept praying and praying and I suddenly felt the urge to speak and utter words not in common tongue. I remembered crying and just feeling overwhelmed.	
A loosening of tongues.	

Q15. Have you experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit?

61 responses



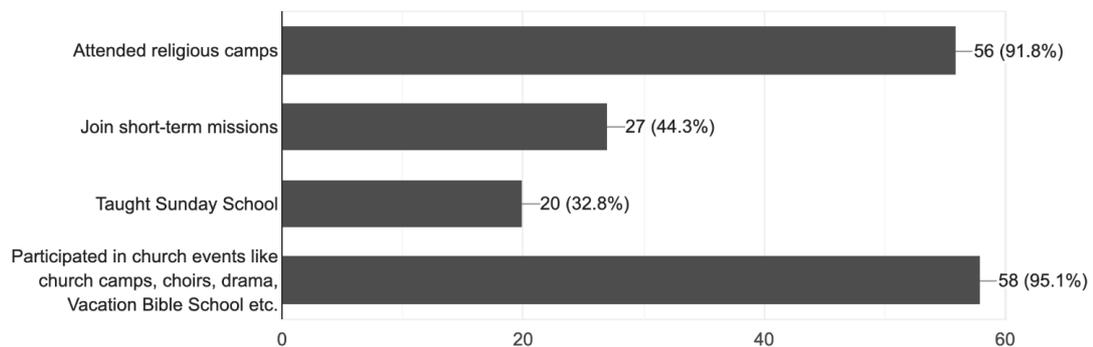
- Yes. If yes, please describe it.
- No

It was very likely that age factor played a greater role in the significance of their experience in comparison with their childhood. By then, they would have been exposed to youth camps and volunteered in the church ministries. This can be seen in their responses when asked about their involvement in the activities of the church (see Chart Q16).

**Church Programmes.** Fifty-eight or 95.1% have participated in church events, another fifty-six or 91.8% have attended religious camps. Almost half at twenty-seven or 44.3% have joined short-term missions, while another twenty or 32.8% taught in Sunday school. This accounts for their responses where forty-five or 73.8% described themselves as participants where their gifts and talents were developed and appreciated. This corresponded with 70.5% (see Chart G06) who attended more than one service of the church weekly. This is in comparison with sixteen or 26.2% who described themselves as spectators.

Q16. I have: (please tick each statement true of your experience)

61 responses



Taken together, these experiences in church - water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, participation in ministries, attending church events like camps, seminar et cetera - are helpful and contributing factors for the emerging adults to likely remain in the church. “Young people wrestle with three ultimate questions: Who am I? (a question of identity), Where do I fit? (a question of belonging), and What difference do I make? (a question of purpose) (Powell 2016, Location 1709). Growth, belongingness and ability to contribute meaningfully correlate with the emerging adults’ worldview.

### Spirituality and Faith of Emerging Adults in the Post-modern Environment

A total of fifty-five or 90.2% individuals attend church mostly or more frequently in comparison to six or 9.8% individuals who attend church less than monthly (see Chart Q21).

Q21. The statement that best represents your church activity now:

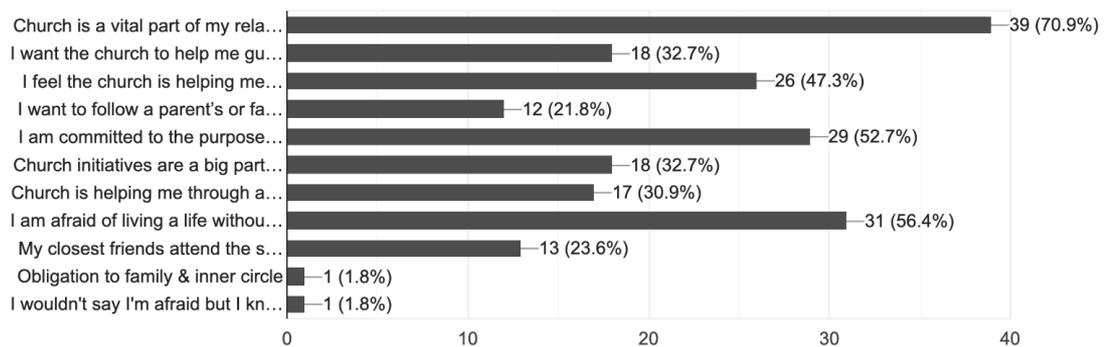
61 responses



When the emerging adults were asked the reasons they stayed, three high points were registered in their responses (see Chart Q21a). Thirty-nine or 70.9% respondents say that the church is a vital part of their relationship with God. Thirty-one or 56.4% say they were afraid of living a life without the spiritual guidance. Twenty-nine or 52.7% say they are committed to the purpose and work of the church.

Q21a. Which of the reasons that young adults stay in church do you identify with? (Indicate with a tick any of the statements that are true for you)

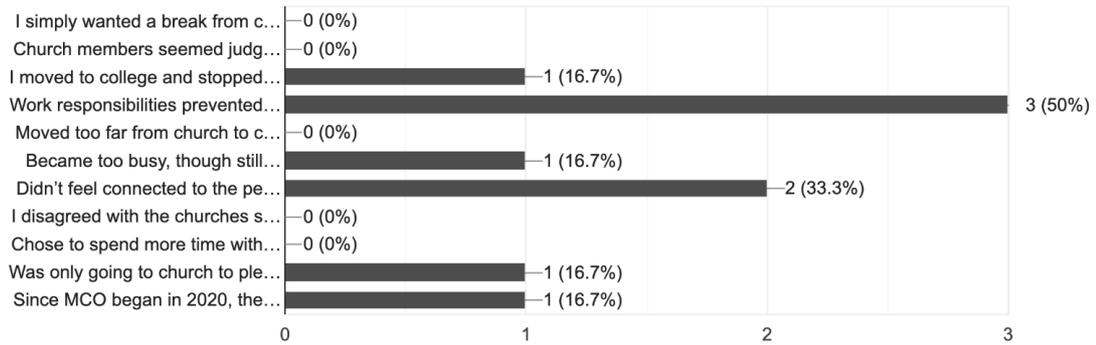
55 responses



Of those who were attending church less than monthly, two key reasons are work responsibilities prevented them from attending at three or 50% , and they did not feel connected to the people in the church at two or 33.3% (see Q21b chart).

Q21b. Which of the reasons have contributed to your church attendance less than monthly.

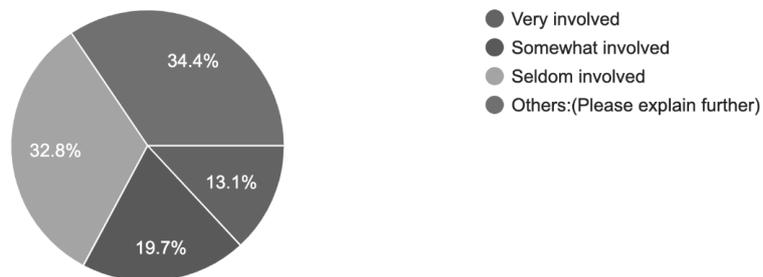
6 responses



In answering the level of involvement in church, eight or 13.1% say they are very involved, with twelve or 19.7% somewhat involved. These two categories accounted for 32.8% of emerging adults surveyed.

If yes, describe the level of your involvement:

61 responses



Fifty-two or 85.2% respondents are single, while six or 9.8% are married, with three or 4.9% preferring not to say. The majority of the emerging adults, forty-three or 70.5%, are currently not enrolled in a college or institution of higher learning. Only eighteen or 29.5% are either currently an undergraduate or graduate student in this online survey. This is indicative that many are in transition or have transited into another phase as working emerging adults. So, juggling a significant change in their lives in the working world and the pressure of find balance will be key concerns.

## Focus Groups

The two focus groups from the two churches reinforced the findings from the online survey. The age range represented were from twenty to twenty-nine. Some are actively serving in church, a few away either because of job or studies. Most of the emerging adults were second-generation Christian, except one who was a first-generation Christian. Three probing questions were asked on their perception of the church, on what contributed to their decision to stay or consider leaving, and on what reinforced or eroded their faith development. In each probing questions, there were sub-questions asked to gain deeper insight of their experiences. It should be noted that I do not have sufficient data on those who have left church as was unable to interview those who have left church despite my attempts.

### Perception of Church

*Is church is an important aspect in my life?* Most of them agreed that church played an important aspect in their lives. One said that “church is a very important part of my life. You get a sense of belonging and guidance, a place of encouragement which is a very vital part for a human.” Another said that “church is also important to me. Church is a place for me to serve.” Another said “that it is important for a person because, personally being in church actually give me more exposure, many experiences compared to other places.” One said that “Church is my closest community group. No community has stayed close to me since middle school,” while another said that “there were a lot of things that I have learned, skills that I have gained being in church.” The experiences of belongingness, Christian love and extended family-like environment. It was felt that church offer a very unique life experience and more exposure through interaction and involvement in church in comparison with other places. It was a place where they have learned much. “If it wasn’t for church, I would probably be one of those guys that the police would be chasing” reiterates another.

*What do you like most about your church?* It was pointed out that intergenerational connection, opportunity to serve, family members who are in the church, and sense of belongingness influenced their decision to stay. One said that “my church is like a family; everyone is comfortable with each other. It is a place I learn a lot of things.”

Another said that “there are people who are willing to be committed to be a part of whatever they are doing, in service or in project.” One emerging adult emphasized the feeling of “an additional family being in church because there are many times that more concern and care are given by others to us, and usually these kind of concerns are only given from immediate family members.”

On the down side, some stated that the cliques, “big families cultures that overspill and blurred relationship boundaries, on the side of the family aspect” were something they disliked. A few mentioned their dislike that church could be cold at times.

### What Contributed to Decision to Stay or Consider Leaving

*What influences your decision to remain in your church?* An emerging adult said “I am comfortable, I know the people in this church, and I have been part of this church for a long time.” One stated that “because I have the chance to serve here. The process here it’s more inviting to me cause people are more willing to teach.” Another reiterated the experiences of

God using us as a team and then we can actually see the congregation being filled with the Holy Spirit. Those kinds of experiences just refresh and renew me, makes it feel that it was all worth it, just makes me want to stay on some more, just to serve some more and to go through some more.

One affirmed, “I stay because of my parents. Having grown up since young, I appreciate everything, from the good and the bad. The values that I have learned. Those I do not forget because those shaped me who I am today.” Another said “I did not want to disappoint my parents. Both of them are Christians and I needed to understand why my parents chose to be a Christian, this religion, and to discover further.” Yet another described his decision to stay because of a personal encounter through two separate prophetic words spoken over his life by two preachers in two separate occasions.

On consideration to leave, some said that the reason was to explore and see how others do church. One said “I am curious,” while another said “If I were to move church, it is towards the bigger churches to experience what the hype is all about, and I can’t say I actually would stay there for good.” Some felt drained from serving and have contemplated leaving. But seeing people blessed helped them through it.

But there was one answer that did cause me to think about the importance of religious experience. This is what he said,

I have served in so many areas in children, teaching children and every bit of that I have taken very seriously. Even though I have tried to lead worship with the very best intention that I want to give glory to God, and not myself, I could not hear from God. The decision that keeps me in church is the great community. It is the community with best intention for you, the intentions for you to grow. I have no obligations to be in church if I have something else which is of greater priority. But I will choose to stay in church, I will still be a regular member unless something else comes up. That's my decision.

*What influences whether your friends to stay or come to your church?* One said "I think everything. Literally everything you see, hear, experience. First impressions are always important. Moving on from first impression, it is always the people, the extend that welcoming thing to others." Another said that if they are "able to mix with this group of people, then they will stay." She reiterated "how the church sees them as visitors, whether we are being judgmental of them" as another factor. Another said the experience friend had "can actually leave an impression on our friends to actually stay or even want to come to church." She also said that "For me I think it should be how we present yourself first. Because sometimes when we are with our friends, you could be really different from how you are in church. So sometimes you may sound like a wrong message. So, when you invite them, they may think that people like you and stuff like that, are your church people like you and everything, if you give like a bad impression."

*What would you change about your church if you had the ability to do so?* One said "I think personally there is no clear solution to this. Culture cannot change easily."

Another reiterated this point by her statement,

Even if someone starts it, it takes a lot of encouragement and determination to really make that small change because it is so deeply ingrained in the society. It takes a lot of people and a lot of effort to do something.

Another added that "it is a very complex thing. The one thing I feel that is needed is the mindset change. How people perceive us, to act in certain ways."

### What Reinforced or Eroded Their Faith Development

*Word of God.* This emerging adult said “a leader who is passionate about the word,” one who “was so excited to share what he’s got, visibly enthusiastic about the point he has to share.” She opined that “if we have that in church, everybody is like enthusiastic about the message, instead of being so quiet, I think that will really reinforce the church.” Another felt more appreciative of God’s Word now especially in dealing with tough questions like the Big Bang theory, evolution which has logic. She said it “allowed me to have a deeper understanding that made a lot of sense to me” rather to just accept what we have learned from Sunday school. Another felt that it was the spiritual Christian growth classes which “helped built my faith which was not that firm.”

*Testimonies and stories.* Another talked about stories or testimonies “where people have gone to points where they are completely hopeless, completely broken, and hearing what God has done for them in those situations helped me think and reflect deeper in my own walk with God.” In one AG church, time was allocated in the worship service for members to publicly testify of God’s working in their lives, answered prayer et cetera.

*Intergenerational relationship.* Another stressed the importance of intergenerational connection which he had experienced in church, of seeing “people below me and above me, and seeing their lives changed from the worst to the best.” He emphasized that “their stories, their faith whether they have walked away, or in people’s perception, in Christian perception, have walked away, how they conducted themselves, to me, is what reinforces, and I believe the church should reinforce.” He said “if I were to take the one thing that I hold dear because of church is the values, not the faith.” In particular, one said “the encouragement from my family, my parents, and it kind of strengthens my faith and hope to not just give up everything, things that I am going through.”

*Parents.* Some pointed to the deep impact parental faith and encouragement had on them. The emerging adult said,

It is seeing faith in my parents. It is in this point of hardship, being human, I couldn’t think of anything else. I just want to get it done, but seeing the faith that my parents put in myself and my abilities, having seen them pray for me

throughout this process. At many times they have more faith than even I have myself. So, seeing that reality, values to application, even in terms of the intergenerational thing, my views have been so affected by them.

Another said, “the encouragement from my family, my parents, it kind of strengthens my faith and hope to not just give up everything, things that I am going through, things that encourages me right now.” The role of parents was significant to reinforce faith especially when they were actively serving in the church also.

*Personal encounters.* Two emerging adults affirmed that personal experiences which reinforced their faith. One said, “I find those are like kind of the times where my faith is being strengthened in God because I was solely relying on God, and then you can see like how much He has guided you and provided for you, and that He is always there.”

Another said,

What probably really impacts me the most is what I experienced myself personally. I can just be doing nothing, but then all of the sudden, God provided me with something, help me get through something, and that would just reinforce my faith, like renew it, refreshes me, make me remember who God is, how He is always looking out for me.

He acknowledged the probable reason was “how I was already brought up all these years, going to church, of putting God first, always remembering and putting Him in my heart so that whatever happens, whatever experience I would feel, I would always relate it to God.” Another revealed that “true hardship is what shapes me. The value is in these hardships that my values come to light.” It was when the rubber meets the road that sparked a deeper appreciation of God’s work in their lives.

*Do religious experiences build your faith?*

*Water baptism.* One said, “Water baptism to me was just a formality.” Another felt “it was coming of age thing, and I did not understand it. It did not play a big part in my faith.” It was pointed out that age played a factor as this individual said, “Being baptized at age eleven, I did not understand its significance.” Another did not think it affected his faith even though “it was a conscious decision. I have never questioned that decision. But it did not affect my faith.” Another provided an interesting insight when he said,

Maybe because of the little simple faith that they have. But when doing it, when you are fifteen and above, or eighteen and above, the choice to say yes and publicly do it, water baptism, has more weight compared to when you are doing it younger. It is how I would view it because I did it when I was a pre-schooler. And truthfully if I were to do it now, I think it takes more courage to do it now, then to do it when I am younger.

However, another saw it as a progression in the faith journey. In her opinion, “I think baptism in water, baptism in the Holy Spirit, experiencing God on a deeper level, I feel like there are levels to accomplish.” She added that it was because “I’m that type of person who has the needs like goals to be able to move forward. So, these goals will help me improve my faith in God.”

*Baptism of the Holy Spirit.* All except one who did not experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit agreed that it built their faith. One said that “the baptism of the Holy Spirit, encounters with God, those strengthens my relationship with God.” Another described that “baptism of the Holy Spirit, for me, affirms the reality of God.” Yet another described her Pentecostal experience in this way:

But baptism of the Holy Spirit, I could tell that it was a spiritual encounter. It is a miracle. I could not understand it, I could not explain it but it was like the blind man. I was blind but now I see.

These experiences of the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place in youth camp and special meetings organized by their churches. It was better appreciated as they were older to grasp its significance.

*Supernatural encounters with God.* One emerging adult observed that “if you have gone through a phase in your life where you didn’t know you were going through, and then you realised, looking back that it would have been impossible, and then you re-evaluate what has got you through.” He concluded that,

maybe in some sense I unknowingly prayed or hoped, that kind of scenarios where everything is going on, I personally feel that God has done something. Then only at that point of time, I will look at it as a sort of reinforcement in some sense. That’s just for me.

For another, her view was that “spiritual encounters were probably God assuring me that He is here. That’s why it is so important.” Another talked about how God

protected him. He said “God has protected me when I was driving, and dozing off behind the wheel. I recognise God’s hand upon my life. I pray before I travel, and recognised His hand upon my life.”

In summary, some emerging adults were facing questions about their personal faith as they transit into emerging adulthood. Some found it hard to align with the idea of faith with logical understanding. Most appreciated Bible teachings throughout their journey of faith which gave them the foundation. Role models of earlier emerging adults, intergenerational connections in the church, and testimonies of God’s working have reinforced and encouraged their faith in Jesus.

Religious experiences had varying impact on the faith. Water baptism was not as impactful as they did not fully understand its significance in comparison to their experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Most indicated that age factor and comprehension of the former played an important part. Their appreciation would have been greater if they were older. Most agreed that the latter brought them into a deeper appreciation of their faith and spirituality. Many felt that the church pastor, parents and church friends have influenced them positively and have reinforced their faith in Jesus. For some, church life and experiences were both bitter and sweet. When asked if they had the power to change somethings in church, the consensus was it would require everyone to contribute in order for it to work and be of significance.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Eight key observations can be seen from the online survey and focus groups. The common theme suggests that the Malaysian experience was similar to what our Western counterpart has experienced. This was especially true in an urban environment where accessibility to modern amenities is available. These are the findings.

Firstly, the Sunway – Subang AG have attrition in their respective churches. Of the sixty-one responses received, only three described themselves as either agnostic, none or prefer not to say. Interestingly, 54.1% identified themselves as Pentecostal, 26.2% as Protestant, and 14.8% just “Christian.”

Secondly, the second and third generation Christians have a different perspective of

religiosity, faith and practice. They were not particularly strong in these aspects of their Christian faith. It was worrisome that there were significant declines in their present perception of God, faith and church. Our discipleship approach has to address this, and finding ways to strengthen our approach.

Thirdly, there was an eroding of Christian beliefs among the emerging adults. While they believe that good, biblical teaching were foundational and needful to nurture their spiritual development, these were not translated into their private religious practices. We need to find ways and means to integrate my seed concept of *head, heart, hand* and *heritage (4H concept)*. This will be explained further in chapter 6.

Fourthly, Christian sacraments like baptism and its practice should be re-looked as significance and reiteration of faith experience are related to age factor. While anyone who has accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour personally was eligible to be water baptised, children should not be actively encouraged to do so. This was especially when the meaning and significance were not understood and did not reinforce their faith. A delay might be more beneficial.

Fifthly, the personal experience of spiritual encounters left indelible marks in their Christian walk such as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Preaching, teaching and other forms of instruction should incorporate the element of the practical experience of expecting the supernatural to break into the present realm as highlight in the focus group. This is tied with the *4H* concept.

Sixthly, the importance and role of intergenerational relationship to nurture faith. The role of older generations, and also the responsibility for the younger generations can contribute to the discipleship approach.

Seventhly, 70.5% are in transition towards working life. This was a major transition from college or tertiary education phase to employment / working phase. Helping them to navigate this transition well was crucial and needful as part of discipleship concern.

Last but not the least, helping them express their faith theologically that was coherent with biblical principles in a postmodern environment is a needful task in our discipleship approach in the local church.

## Review of the Chapter

The findings from the general online survey and focus groups reveal the need to help the emerging adults find an equilibrium in their faith and changing phase of their lives since more than 70% are in transition into working phase. The reality of being disconnected, competing worldview in marketplaces, unbraided freedom et cetera can erode faith developed from a habitual culture of attending church as a youth, instead of personal conviction.

The survey and focus group indicate that faith mattered to them. It may need a different interpretation and expression from the status quo. We have to shift our conceptual reference in terms of *how* faith is expressed and looks like. Since many are either second and third generation Christian, their terms of reference has always been the Christian home. Their faith has not been challenged like that of their parents or grandparents.

Nevertheless, that does not mean they face no difficulties and challenges to their faith. In a postmodern environment marked by fast pace living and changing cultural landscape, technological advancements have enabled real-time access to a myriad of information and data. These emerging adults have been raised where their first language is the *e-language* that has shaped the world of information, trade, social networking et cetera. Increasingly, the devices that are meant to connect people with people, have disengaged them from each other. These are the prominent trends of today where one can literally buy and sell, order and purchase at the click of the button without having to step out of the home. This was significant in a pandemic circumstance of hybrid church service.

The next chapter look at the initiative and approach taken by AG in the past and current response to engage the emerging adults.

## CHAPTER 5: AG CHURCH PAST INITIATIVES AND CURRENT RESPONSE

This chapter consists of the findings from the archival survey and five personal interviews of stakeholders, of what AG did in the past and the responses of pastoral leadership in Sunway – Subang in their respective churches.

### Insights from the Findings

The findings here are based on data obtained from the *archival research* on past AG initiatives to disciple the youth (and emerging adults), and *five personal interviews* with key stakeholders: three senior pastors in Sunway – Subang, Malaysia, the YA Director and BCM President.

#### Archival Survey

***Emerging Adult Members.*** A general survey of the available data stored in the General Council office of the AG Malaysia was intended to identify the percentage of population of the emerging adults. The reporting by churches has not exceeded 35% of the total number of churches in Malaysia. Specifically, the annual reporting from the Central District churches was better at approximately 50%, especially among the English-speaking congregations. Total adherents of AG Malaysia stand at 49,810 with three hundred and ninety-three churches nation-wide as of September 2020. This was based on 86% report returned by churches to the Council office. There was no breakdown on the age segments as members or adherents above eighteen years old were lumped together with the adult grouping in the annual questionnaire as demarcated in the AG constitution (Article 6.3.(1) [b]). So long as an individual is eighteen and above, they are registered under the category of adult as provided for in its constitution. These figures do not include the children segment in the AG churches.

***Emerging Adult Ministers.*** The AG archival records were available on ministers who were in the age bracket of twenty-one to thirty from 2008 to 2020. Nationwide, a total of 91 applicants were for the *Christian Worker (CW)* credential, an average of seven per

year. A total of forty applied for the *Minister Associate (MA)* credential, an average of three annually. One hundred and one applied for the *Licensed Minister (LC)*, with an average of eight per year. The *CW* is a credential opened to all AG members who have a desire to serve God more actively. They did not have to be full-time, and were often lay people of the churches. Both the *MA* and *LC* are for those involved in full-time ministry. The total credential members stand at eight hundred and twenty-three, of which two hundred and thirty-two or 28.2% are in the emerging adult segment. This was an approximate ratio of one in four, which is reflective of the composition in many AG churches. Currently, there are less than one hundred who are below thirty years old holding the *MA* and *LC* credentials. This reflects that many did not consider full-time ministry as their preference in relation to their faith and vocation.

***Youth Alive Malaysia.*** The archival research was done and data were extracted from AG yearbooks on the activities and initiatives related to age segment of youth and emerging adults. The data were extracted from the annual meeting year books from 2001, the year where Youth Alive Malaysia (YAM) was officially launched. These were presented annually in Annual General Meetings, and from 2008 every two years at the Biennial General Meetings.

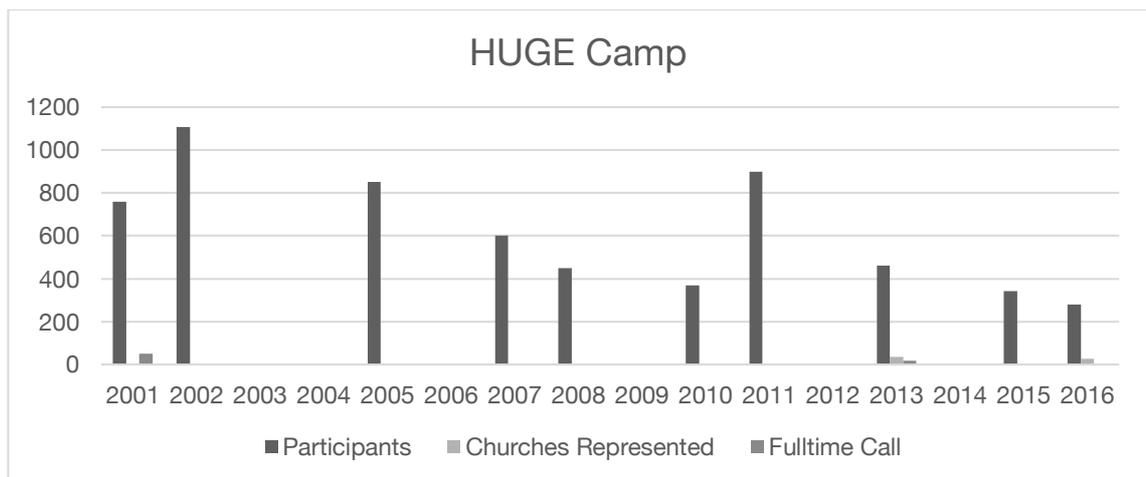
Specific focus was on the YAM which worked closely with youth and young adult segments of the AG fellowship. Their activities throughout the twenty years were extracted from yearbooks, committee records, and personal documents available. Since YAM works in collaboration with the Bible College of Malaysia (BCM) on the Youth Enrichment School (YES), records were obtained on the enrolment of students at BCM.

The archival research covered the period beginning from 2001 to 2020. What were available were extracted from AG annual year book through the report submitted by the YA Director on the initiatives and activities related to the *Youth Alive* Department. What was significant was information on two key initiatives that were heavily emphasized: the *Have U Got Enuf* (HUGE) camp and the two weeks *Youth Enrichment School* (YES) held in partnership with BCM in the first quarter of the year.

## National Initiatives

***HUGE Camp.*** The HUGE camp essentially was the annual highlight where a national camp was organized in December, opened to all youth ministries and fellowship of the AG churches. The size of the camps was between two hundred and eighty to one thousand one hundred strong, with many AG churches synchronizing their youth calendar with this major event. Essentially, the key emphasis was on revival. These rally camp had heavy emphasis on salvation, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and fulltime call to serve God. It was a massive draw for the urban churches, but lesser impact on rural churches. Ten editions were held between 2001 – 2016, with an average participation of six hundred youth and young adult (see *HUGE Camp Chart*).

These three nights camps built some momentum for the national youth department, but did not translate into sustainable follow-up for respective local youth fellowship in AG churches as the resources were limited and dominated by a few big size AG churches. The launch in 2001 and spike in 2002 were inception years under the leadership of the first YAM Director. Subsequently, with the change of leadership in 2005, the camp participation drew in eight hundred and fifty youth and young adults after a two years absence. Over the next few editions, the level of participation would decline with an exception for 2011. These camps have not been organized after 2016, with the lowest participation of two hundred and eighty campers.



With the changing of YA leadership in 2016 which organized the last HUGE camp, more emphasis was placed on personal engagement and mentoring of local AG churches youth leaders for the next generation of youth. This was echoed by the YAM

Director in his report that “in 2019, YAM came to realize that its signature events like HUGE and APYAC (Asia Pacific Youth Alive Conference) were familiar to the current young working adults. These names do not resonate with the current Gen. Z youth” and needed rebranding and rebuilding (AG 53<sup>rd</sup> Business Meeting 2021, 48).

It can be observed that the HUGE events did raise the excitement of the youth and young adult. But its draw has declined overtime with successive youth generation, compounded by local AG churches having the capacity to organize their respective camp to cater to their church needs. Sensing that shift, it prompted the YAM Director to change its strategy to disciple and train youth leaders and workers for the next generation in smaller settings.

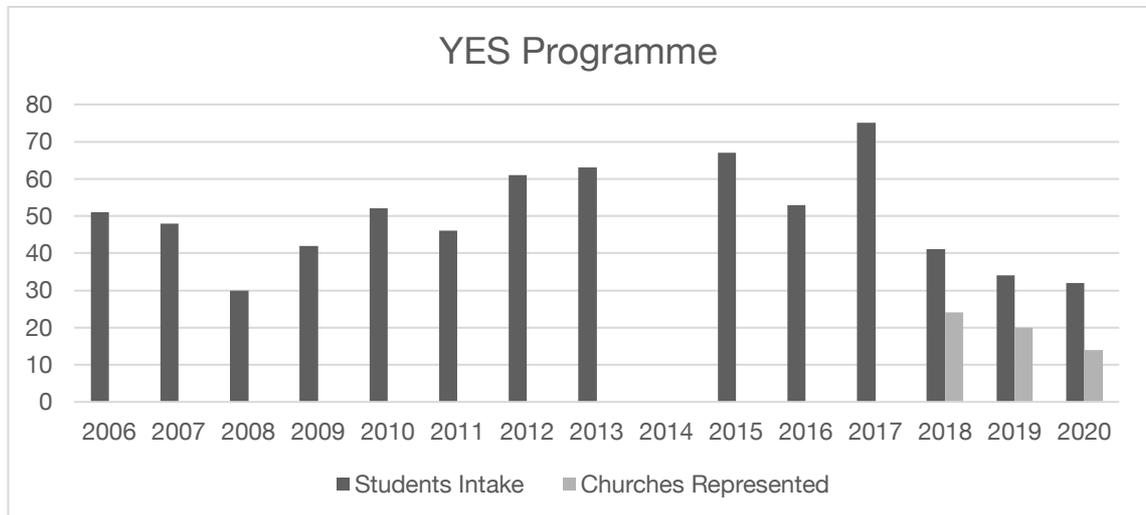
The rebranding of HUGE saw the launched of the *National Youth Camp* in March 2018 with two hundred participants aimed at being relevant and appealing to the new generation.

From the initiatives and programmes executed, it was clear that other big events like the Asia-Pacific YA Conference, Influence Conference and Heal the Nation Conference were attractive in drawing participation from local AG churches and also international delegates. These big events were held once every few years in different cities in Asia Pacific and not featured annually. It did energized the youth groups in the short term. These conference had strong missions focus to challenge the participants. But these were not sustainable on the long run as the local AG churches shifted their focus on their respective churches. Many smaller AG congregations depended heavily on the youth and emerging adult for the services in the church.

***Youth Enrichment School.*** The Youth Enrichment School (YES) was organized in partnership with BCM, AG national bible school. It was felt that since BCM was impetus and played a significant role in the early days of AG through the training and sending out of workers or pastors who pioneered new AG church through Malaysia, these youth leaders could be disciplined as a follow up from the HUGE camp experience. It was hugely popular and attracted an average of fifty youth participants in fourteen editions since 2006 (see *YES Chart*).

The YES school covered two weeks of stay-in training in BCM dormitory. Classes, chapel service and Christian duties formed a part of the curriculum as experienced by

students enrolled in BCM. The school end with a weekend away to minister in another church in small teams. It replicated the BCM Ministry Team approach where students are sent out to churches to minister and promote the college. This provided opportunities for exposure and experiences beyond their respective home churches.



Its curriculum covered five areas: creativity, ministry, self-development, leadership and theology. The targeted group was those who were waiting for their SPM or STPM results, as they transit into college or tertiary education. The two-week curriculum gave the participants a foretaste of BCM training and life, a peek into the fulltime ministry world.

The YES school was notably impactful in equipping youth and emerging adults as these young leaders come from various AG churches. An average of nineteen churches were represented from 2018 – 2020 from available data. Most of these youth were from urban churches. More than eight hundred young people have attended this programme. More than twenty have gone on to be trained for fulltime ministry after attending the YES school. There was no YES school in 2014 because BCM was undergoing renovation that year.

### Personal Interviews

Interviews were planned with selected stakeholders like the senior pastor, youth pastor, young adult pastor and young adult leaders. In the end, the interviews were specific to three senior pastors as they have the great influence on the direction of the emerging

adults. This was also because in the focus groups, young adult worker and leaders were represented. Of the three senior pastors, one is in the young adult age category. The instrument employed was a sixty minutes interview.

Firstly, the interviews with senior pastors of their respective churches. The purpose was to gain insight into their pastoral experiences in relation to the emerging adults in their churches. The span of the interviews varied from sixty-one to sixty-eight minutes in duration. This was done via zoom as the pandemic restricted face-to-face option. Five questions were structured for the interviews. It covered the size of the congregations, brief descriptions on the church and its key characteristics; the ratio of emerging adults, experiences of attrition and reasons for leaving; their concerns for the emerging adults, and how it was being addressed; their views on the merging adults' spirituality, and the church's approach to nurture them; and their perception on the greatest needs of the emerging adults in the church, and the role of the church in discipling them.

Secondly, the interview with the President of the Bible College of Malaysia (BCM). The focus and strategy in training youth workers and ministers are crucial to building a coherent curriculum that can address and empower these students with the skills and tools needful to engage this segment of the church. The interview seeks the president's vision and view on how the national bible college can fulfill its tagline *Preparing Lives for Ministry* in training the present and future ministers equipped to reach the emerging adults in a changing world.

The interview was on the institution philosophy and approach in training ministers to work among or with emerging adults. Five questions were used identify the strategy and emphasis of the AG national bible college in training future ministers for the field; to ascertain the college's appeal among emerging adults as the theological centre for full-time ministry, and the school's perception of the emerging adult students in relation to their call and worldview.

Thirdly, the interview with the Youth Alive Malaysia (YAM) Director. The YAM Director works with the key leaders in a national committee with a four-fold mission (yamsia. n.d. In *Facebook*): reaching youth; raising youth pastors, workers and leaders; rallying and reinforcing church youth groups; and recognizing and releasing youth. The strategy and tie-up with AG churches are crucial conversations needful to track present

and future plans of engagement to raise and reinforce faith of emerging adults. He also works with youth and young adult ministers and workers from the local churches on personal, regional and national platforms.

Five questions were used touching on the role, strategy and collaboration with local AG churches. It was key to understand the views of initiatives to strengthen and enhance youth groups in local churches. It would reflect the current and future landscape of the local church, district and national council as these were the next generation helming the leadership of the churches.

The interviews with senior pastors, national youth alive director and the president of BCM were scheduled. They were informed of the purpose and content of the interview to be conducted. The approximate duration was put forth. It was set for approximately one hour to one-and-a-half-hour session. The research proposal was explained at the preliminary of the interview, and their participation reiterated before progressing further.

The data were video recorded, copied and filed with password-protection code. These personal interviews were transcribed and coded numerically by assigning code reference (PI#01 - 05).

### Local Church Engagement of the Emerging Adults

Three senior pastors were interviewed to gain insights from their experiences in nurturing the emerging adults in their respective churches. The sizes of these churches are between one hundred to three hundred for the English-speaking congregation. The common description given on their respective churches were they are an intergenerational church, with a mixed of various age groups. These churches have up to four generations with their membership.

Each respective church saw the need among the emerging adults in their congregations. The similarities were the emerging adults form about between 15% to 20% of their congregation strength, and have an ageing segment above the fifties forming the majority. It was noted that the emerging adult segment was perceived to be the weakest segment in terms of numerical reference. One pastor said, "I think that is where we are

weakest.” These churches have experienced some attrition of the merging adults in the past. The reasons were related to job transfers, moving to other churches because of interpersonal issues, or simply too busy with their working life. One pastor said that they left because of “interpersonal issues, and they have conflict with one another, misunderstanding and clashes.” Some find it difficult to be in the same church with their parents, preferring to be in another church. As this pastor puts it, “When they become emerging adults, especially second generation, they find it very difficult to be in the same church with their parents, and being treated like kids.” Another comment was made that “they want to try something new and make it themselves. That’s the current thinking among the emerging adults.”

***Connecting the emerging adults.*** Concerns were raised about their connectedness and level of commitment within the church. The underlining concern stems from a segment of emerging adults population who are not connected to the youth or young adult groups in the church. One pastor said that “they don’t get themselves connected with either the youth group or the young adult group. Usually, they are loners, lone ranger. We do have quite a number of them.” She opined that those who were connected, were active and serving in various capacities in the church ministries. Another pastor described his frustration, “Current emerging adults are not so committed as the ones that I started the church with.” The transition towards adult, while managing career demands are posing quite a challenge to these emerging adults. Arnett (2000, 469) pointed out that these emerging adults are very independent-minded. They make their own decisions, and unlikely to talk to their pastor for advice unless there is a closeness in relationship. These pastors saw the need for intentional integration and acknowledged the role of intergenerational relationship in the decision of emerging adults continued presence in the church. It was observed that those who have personal engagement and interactions within the church tend to be more stable and involved in the church ministries.

***Small group strategy.*** One church chose to work through the network of cell as the key to keep connectedness with the emerging adults. Since the church has a membership of a few hundred, cell network became crucial in keeping fellowship via these small groups. This church is also implementing a pilot mentorship project in which the older members volunteer themselves to be available to walk with some of these emerging adults. This programme seeks to provide spiritual, career, life skills et cetera where

those who sign up will meet on a monthly basis. This is a more formal intentional discipleship approach which line up with their desire to plan for leadership succession in the future. For another, he took the approach of personal nurturing of the emerging adults which started about two years ago, and “using various ministry platforms to bridge the gap.” He said,

Because our church is not a big church, we have the luxury to do this kind of engagement, like building relationship and being very intentional in grooming them. Of course, giving them room to make mistakes. We are not afraid of failures. If we fail, we just do everything again. Because we are not performance driven.

This church has the ability and flexibility to try new approaches without too much difficulties. The openness to failure and learning from it, and try something else is what gives them the edge.

***Intergenerational projects.*** This pastor’s approach was to work closely with the youth and young adults on projects and ministries. She said that

There are certain activities, projects, ministries that can bridge the generation. So, we started this a few years ago, we have annual projects, short term projects. It could be organising an event, a camp, organising something, I always tell them that they must put in the young adults, young people in there.

For another, he said “there is a missing generation in our church, my generation – thirty to forty years old – this gap the people are actually missing. The uncles and aunties are not playing any active role in term of engaging with the emerging youth.” He used ministry platforms like “the worship team where the older one and the younger ones, have more chances to engage each other.” Similar to the earlier church pastor, he said “When we run special projects, events of the church, we will encourage the adults and young people to work together. Hopefully these platforms, we are trying to bring the gap closer, rather than divide them, or segregating between them.”

***Willingness and openness to accommodate divergent views.*** On their views of the emerging adults’ spirituality, a pastor felt that “they express their spirituality very differently from us,” the first generation believers. One pastor lamented that “because their worldview is so different, some don't mind travelling alone with the opposite gender. The surprising thing is that the female does not mind. So these are the new things that are coming out.” They might be very open to the current issues in the

marketplaces, listen to secular songs, and were still keenly connected to God. They did not appreciate being told what to do as they have their own views and are opinionated. Instead, mutual respect and humility should be exercised and to not make comparisons of faith between the first and second or third generation Christian. The postmodern mindset as posited by Anderson “celebrates diversity, which can result in moral relativism and a demand for tolerance.” This mindset is different from those who grew up during the modern era which “valued objective certainty, based on rational – rather than religious or mystical – means of attaining truth” (2001, 251).

***A place of refuge.*** One pastor talked about creating an open door and option where those that left can come back in should they choose to do it. He said,

Some of them may drift, some of them will drift, but we find that it is easier to come back. We have people who come back simply because there is relationship. I think I am a realist. People will move away, but I like always tell the church, when they want to come back, will our church be the first option? It can only be the first option if you are not judgment, if you are welcoming.

To create an environment where those who have left could come back, it involves the ability to welcome and extend an open hand of fellowship that does not seek to condemn or vilify their decision to leave in the first place. Church should be a place of refuge to accept anyone.

***Life Skill Training.*** One raised the key concern on the influence of the world where current issues like abortion, gay or same sex marriage are acceptable. They felt that the greatest needs of the emerging adults in their congregation is the need for guidance as they transit into the working phase, and how to continue to help them sustain their faith and passion to serve. He said we need to train the emerging adults

How to live with the right life, even if you are not a very committed believer, at least live right in terms of skills. We have a whole series of personal finances, how to stay out of debt. Then there is training of job skill, sharing information, even how to place themselves in a better position when they go for interview. So the older members with years of experience have contributed. I think that they appreciate that. So it is not just biblical studies, some topics on how to become a better person.

***Variety of approaches.*** All three have employed approaches that were unique to their church needs in engaging and discipleship of the emerging adults. This was because of the variable that came from their church culture and leadership. One was a church

which has seen the succession of a few pastors, another led by the pioneering pastor, and another a young adult in a church with about forty years of history. Three have varying key focus on being a missional, intergenerational or building relationship. One pastor said that theirs was “the cell church approach” to ensure members were connected. One church focused “on the building relationship with one another,” while another emphasized their intergenerational approach. He said, “Our ministries begin with one month old babies; the parents bring them to church. We have the cradle room where the child, the mom, the father participates; right up to senior citizens.”

In summary, local AG churches employed varied approaches that were relevant and tailored to their respective needs and culture to engage the emerging adults in their congregation.

#### National Bible College Engagement of the Emerging Adults

The president shared on the vision of BCM’s holistic training approach of ministers. The philosophy was very basic: providing theological, biblical education with the emphasis on spiritual formation as “we are geared towards training people for church ministry.” The philosophy tended to lean towards a grass root level, training for ministry, character formation, and are crafted into curriculum and non-curriculum activities.

He highlighted one key cooperation was with YAM in training and discipling youth and emerging adults through the YES school in BCM. It was a short-term program, where students who were waiting for the Form Five results would come and join the program and stay in the school throughout the two weeks, almost like the full-time students staying in the dormitory, interact with the students and they will learn from the teachers, sometimes from our lecturers as well.

In terms of the impact, the feedback, the students’ perception of BCM as very scary, very rigid, very old-fashioned, only old people would come was changed. He said that “Through the program they get see for themselves, almost like a taste event, and get to taste for themselves and have eye opening experience. And also, they will stay with the rest of the fulltime students.” Sharing room and staying the rest of the full-time students provided the opportunity to interact with current bible school students. He also

reported that “based on past experience, there were a number of students that came out of the youth enrichment school and became full-time student. The effectiveness is there” and helpful for the youth. BCM was not to just training them to be pastors. It has to help those school leaver to have some sort of a basic biblical theological foundation before they move on to further their studies. Through it, connections were made and BCM was able to follow up with them. The youth gained a perspective that they actually could study in bible school for their own spiritual development. This has been very helpful.

#### National Youth Alive Department Engagement of the Emerging Adults

The national director explained the role this national department:

We are part of the AG of Malaysia. Being the National Youth Department. We basically, seven of us, come together, playing the role to spearhead the raising leaders in the nation. Also raising leaders in local churches. That is what we want to do and we want to stir up the fire within the youth, and even the youth pastors. From youth pastors to the youth in the local churches.

The focus started with the youth pastors, and then working its way down to the youth in the local churches. It related with district councils and local churches based on relationship and friendship that were built overtime. The vision of YAM was imparted by connecting with friends in the AG fellowship. It was revealed that the demographic of the youth or young adult in AG churches nationally was not good. Nationally, YAM was reaching out to between three hundred to four hundred of them. It was felt that the youth population was rising, and a big number remained untapped.

Most churches in the Klang Valley, in my estimation, would have the size of between twenty to fifty in their youth group. Most youth programmes catered to the age bracket of between thirteen to twenty-two. Consequently, he opined that AG have lost one or two generations of young adults. He revealed that

There are the younger young adults. I think that is a very unique, very niche, very untouched group that youth YA has not been focusing on. In fact, it is a group that even my church or churches have not been focusing on.

In view of this, there was a need to start another stream to reach the emerging adults as the current stream predominately focused on youth up to the age of between twenty and

twenty-two. He opined that a totally different programme, with a different mindset, initiatives and approach to engage and reach them.

The challenge faced was *how* to help youth transit *seamlessly* between age segments within the church. This was the key issue faced by most churches, that youth were lost in their transition through emerging adulthood. He said that for his church which was undergoing restructuring,

The word "seamless" was the main theme because we have lost a fair bit of the young adults as well. And so now we are also thinking of how we can transition them seamlessly. And to do seamlessly is to have dept, less transition. With less transition means, there will be less people will get lost in between.

As a national department, there was not a concrete road map currently. The seed work was to engage the front-liners like youth pastors and leaders who worked and ministered among them. The strategy was to concentrate on the “engine room” of spiritual formation and equipping them. He said that by “focusing on the whole person, the wholeness of this minister, and something good came out because it actually made them stronger, made them more resilient, made them more lasting, they could go the long haul.” The hope was to build resilience in disciples who grew up in the post-modern world. Such preparation would enable them to pick up the vision and run with it. *SHARPEN* was one initiative to identify and help them towards maturity. The ratio breakdown of youth pastors working with emerging adults was as follows: first generation Christian, less than 5%; second generation Christian were the majority at 85%; third generation Christian also very, very few.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Firstly, there was no set approach to disciple the emerging adults in the local churches. Various initiatives at church level were implemented to determine what works and what did not. For example, each AG church has its own emphasis and philosophy of ministry, varying approach and strategy are employed based on its age, history and available resources. One church emphasized rebuilding the youth and rejuvenating the church by concentrating time and resources in them. As a smaller church, it could implement an approach that leaned heavily on building relationship. Another larger size church concerned with leadership transition crafted a mentoring programme to bridge

the generations in line with their emphasis as a family church. Another described the church as an intergenerational church, with older adults connecting with emerging adults to navigate their faith with working life by sharing practical life skills like budgeting, marriage, career advancement or *adoption initiative* while they are away from their families.

Secondly, pastoral perception and discipleship approach towards emerging adults need a relook. The views of local pastors on this segment of church membership need further dialogue. Assumptions of their need without clarification through needful conversation may have resulted in approaches that were not helpful for their transition in life. Faith and practice should be holistic, touching every aspect of their budding adulthood phase. The change in pastoral practice from *prescribing what to do* in comparison to *describing available options* is needed in addressing fiercely independent individuals who value both friendship and at the same time, adamant on personal autonomy.

Thirdly, the attrition among the emerging adults in Sunway - Subang may not be very serious. But it does raise concerns that the rate may accelerate in the future. Pastoral leadership has to incorporate the major findings to build the church, to actively engage, and to nurture them holistically in any discipleship approach.

Fourthly, a more coherent and nationally driven initiative may be helpful. The collaboration of the BCM and YAM and local churches needs to be stepped up.

### **Review of the Chapter**

The past initiatives need to be relooked and rebranded in engaging the youth and emerging adults in a sustainable way. Networking and cooperation the church and national bodies are needful to impact the AG church in a holistic manner so that youth transiting into adulthood phase will not drop into the cracks.

The next chapter deals with the conclusion and implications as we craft a discipleship process, incorporating the findings of chapter 4 and 5.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Researching and writing this project has been a sharp learning curve in doing ministry among the emerging adults. The factors and changing circumstances precipitated global shifts and attitudes toward religiosity and faith. While the shift has been dramatic in the Western Hemisphere, the Asian counterpart has not been spared though at a slower pace. The interconnectedness of our world today via the e-media has widely affected church, as we have known it to be.

It is without doubt that the future and health of the church lie in our ability to address the issues of attrition among the emerging adults. With significant dropout rates, there will be a vacuum in grooming the emerging adults to be the next generation leaders of the church. It was with this purpose that this project was seeking answers to address the attrition of the emerging adults from the AG churches, with specific focus on the Sunway – Subang, Malaysia.

The field research was indicative of the struggles and phenomenon hitting the shores of the AG churches in Sunway & Subang, and nationally among the urban AG churches. It is undeniable that the attrition of emerging adults in our churches were like the experiences of our Western counterpart. The dissimilarities are in our Asian context, our mixed diversities in religious flavour, and economic developments. However, the churches in the urban setting in the Asian context are experiencing this phenomenon, nevertheless. The findings from the six churches, three senior pastors, BCM president, the Director of Youth Alive Malaysia and AG archives are meaningful in working towards a discipleship approach to address the attrition of the merging adults in the AG churches in the urban setting.

It was hoped that we can better manage and address the changing and challenging landscape of doing church in the post-modern post-Christian world among the emerging adults. As the borders become porous and cross-border travel convenient, so are the importation of various values and culture.

The significance of this research deals with a current issue in pastoral ministry. The future of the church is on the line. Continued attrition of the emerging adults will

seriously impact the health and strength of the church. The focus of this research is aimed at discovering the factors contributing to the emerging adults leaving the church. The findings will help in crafting a discipleship approach that will be meaningful specifically for this segment of the church.

Findings reveal that there was attrition in Sunway – Subang churches. It serves as a *biopic* representation of the urban churches of the AG Malaysia. Like our Western counterpart, there are concerns that the rate may accelerate if nothing is done to address it. That the repeated trend has been observed the past thirty years should not be discounted as irrelevant. There are similarities observed from the findings on the decreasing religiosity of the emerging adults. The impact of the Internet age, the rapid urban lifestyle, the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) times we live in increased the stress of postmodern living. This has been compounded by the covid-19 pandemic that has reshaped human social interaction.

Chapter Two highlighted three push factors for emerging adults to leave the church. Their negative perception of the institutional church as overprotective, anti-science, repressive and exclusive; her inability to accommodate and engage their questions and skepticism; and emerging issues that project the church as not in touch with reality and concerns of emerging issues in society. I have also stated three pull factors – intergenerational relationship in the church; faith that works which is relevant and impacts the society; holistic engagement of the church with the community and the larger society in a meaningful way – are all interconnected with the discipleship process in a local church context. How the local church addresses both the push and pull factors increases success rate of youth transiting into adulthood phase.

In seeking to arrive at an approach to disciple the emerging adults, it should encompass a theologically sound expression in which spirituality and faith in a post-modern environment are lived out. Tapping into the current conversations on youth ministry will afford us insights to an integrated approach where vibrant faith that is faithfully coherent to the Bible may be expressed. The transition from youth into adulthood has proven to be a delicate task in the phase of emerging adulthood.

There were eight major findings from Chapter Four from the field research. These are grouped into three specific segments. The first segment is the anthropological,

sociological, and psychological. The second segment is the pastoral. Last but not the least, the ecclesiological.

These findings for the first segment reveal there was attrition, but the rate will increase over time. From the anthropological, sociological, and psychological standpoints, the role of intergenerational relationship is importance to nurture faith. More than 70.5% of the emerging adults are in a major transition into working phase.

These findings for the second segment show Christians from different generations have a different perspective of religiosity, faith and practice. It was also revealed that there was not one set approach to disciple the emerging adults. It highlighted an erosion of Christian beliefs among the emerging adults, and the need to help translate biblical teachings into private religious practices.

These findings for the third segment reinforces the need for the church to connect Christian sacraments like baptism, spiritual experiences like baptism of the Holy Spirit, helping them express their faith theologically coherent with biblical teachings. Ecclesiology should be meaningful and significant to the faith and spiritual experiences of the emerging adult. There should be balance between the *symbolism* of the Christian practices and their *significance* to the believers i.e. emerging adults specifically.

### **Contributing Factors Emerging Adults Leave or Remain in Church**

Firstly, *intentional relationship plays a significant role and is a key element*. It was discovered that a strong, meaningful relationship in the church plays a key role influencing their decision to stay. A sense of belonging inculcated through various initiative like small groups, intergenerational projects, mentoring programs et cetera can nurture relationship bonds. It will strengthen continued participation in the church and ministries. This was reflected in 59% of the respondents stating that they enjoyed the fellowship in the church, and 50.8% felt a sense of belonging. Any discipleship approach should incorporate *building relationship bridge* intentionally. That may mean tailoring it in accordance to the context of the local church.

Secondly, *the local church has to engage them in a meaningful way to build connection*. There were three keys reasons identified by the young adults why they stayed in church. Firstly, church was a vital part of their relationship with God (70.9%). Secondly, they

were afraid to live a life without spiritual guidance of the church (56.4%) and thirdly, they were committed to the purpose and work of the church (52.7%). This is connected to the need for the church to go beyond the walls of the church to engage actively with the larger community. Therefore, it is important for the church to create or provide opportunities for the emerging adults to serve God beyond internal church activities. For example, planning a blood donation drive for the community, providing food aid in the present pandemic where many people have been adversely affected economically because of job loss, loss of income et cetera. Empowering them reinforces that their faith works and has tangible ramifications. Also, spiritual impartation and direction for emerging adults are key considerations in developing a discipleship approach are revealed from the survey. Life skills should be a component of the curricular in helping them transit better from youth in study phase to working adult phase. The findings showed that emerging adults do place importance to their faith in a tangible way, and see the important role of the church in their faith journey. However, because of the access to the vastness of information in this age, active engagement is needful. We are selective on the information that we search for. Imagine the unbridled flow of information the emerging adults are overloaded with. Without a solid Bible foundation and a trained critical mind, an uncritical acceptance of information on the internet can prove harmful. The church and the Bible are no longer the vital sources of information. Any assumptions of religious importance of the (institutional) church will not translate into automatic allegiance to the church. The existence of *emergent church* testifies to this that there are Christians who are pursuing something else that offers a divergent expression of *church*. This has been revealed in Chapter Two where emerging adults have expressed “their concerns, delusions, frustrations, and disappointments” (32).

Thirdly, *the willingness and openness of the church to accommodate divergent views* should not be viewed as a threat or with heightened alarm. While the respondents surveyed reflected a negative minority view, their perception of the church should also be taken into account. Six point six percent revealed they had been hurt by members, while nine point eight percent do not have a positive view of the church. Constructive engagement should be preferred and this is an opportunity to understand or appreciate their concerns. An openness to dialogue in whatever form available affords the church a door to enter their world and address their concerns, struggles and ideals. This is especially true where our present society celebrates diversity and acceptance, and

therefore the demand for tolerance. This creates a safe place, a place of refuge to come back to for the emerging adults should they choose to reversed their decision in leaving the church in the first place. The world is culturally and socially more diverse in the urban setting. It can be assumed that it is a melting pot of cultural diversity. Cities have attracted people from every continent, and information at the fingertip has exacerbated this further.

Fourthly, *the environment of acceptance and enablement in the faith community*. This was revealed in the focus groups which highlighted adults who have impacted them in their lives. This involved pastors, leaders and members who reached out to them, cared for them and were people who they could turn to. Fifty point eight percent surveyed stated that they have a sense of belonging. Another 59% enjoy the fellowship in the church, with 60.7% enjoying the worship in church service. These are positives to the environment in the faith community. The emerging adults are attracted to the aspects of genuine adult-empowering relationships. In contrast, condescending attitudes are deterrents as emerging adults are strongly independent and at the same time relational. Top-down approach to faith and relationship do not work in a world that is used to accommodate and promotes inclusivity. When a church is willing to engage meaningfully beyond the four walls of the building, it cements their loyalty and commitment to the local church as in touch with the society. They are not attracted to the *business as usual* approach. Rather, they are seeking active church involvement in the community.

### **Perception Change Needed for AG Church to Address the Needs of the Emerging Adults**

Firstly, *there is a need to recognize the dissimilarities of perspective on religiosity, faith, and practice among the emerging adults*. This is a major finding that there is a difference in perspectives of religiosity, faith and practice between the first with the second and third generation Christians. For instance, what is objective to the first generation in terms of Christian values like premarital sex is not viewed in the same light. They are more accepting and open, having grown in a postmodern world that is more tolerant and accepting. The narrative that they have been exposed to, has been shaped by rights movement, political correctness attitudes et cetera. These have become the bedrock of the postmodern society they live in. Such values are not only accepted.

They are assumed. In developing an approach for the emerging adults, one has to take into account their needs. Second and third generation Christians make up a total of 83.6% of the emerging adult respondents at 45.9% and 37.7% respectively.

Secondly, *the maturity process has been prolonged unlike previous generation*. The works of Arnett (2000, 2015), Bengston (2013), Jamieson (1998), Moller (2016) et cetera have revealed that sociological changes have stretched the maturing process of youth into adulthood. They spend more years in finishing education at tertiary level in comparison to their parents. Transiting from a student phase to working phase has proved a major hurdle, and a difficult challenge. Helping them find equilibrium in a holistic way is a needful task. The findings reveal that to connect with the emerging adults, helping them to transit as a student into the working world is a crucial consideration. That may mean changes in our expectations in their involvement and expression of personal faith in the church, ministry et cetera.

Thirdly, *the connection of their faith with church sacraments and spiritual experiences* like water baptism, communion, baptism of the Holy Spirit, volunteering should be *reinforced*. For instance, water baptism at an early age and closely tied with coming from a Christian home, should be relook. It should not be just another event in their lives. The significance to their faith has to be impressed into their faith, and age factor plays a crucial role. So, follow through on these experiences should be emphasized *before, during and after the fact*. A discipleship approach has to incorporate a meaningful connection and significance to their faith and practice in order to strengthen and leave indelible marks.

Fourthly, *the need for a safe space to explore and express personal doubts on their faith*. Since they are largely a digitized generation, the challenges and distractions to their faith beliefs system are unlike previous generations. Stifling dissenting views, conformity and uniformity of faith expression and expectations, among other things, will deter needful faith conversations. We can no longer *prescribe* a particular expression or expectation. Instead, we need to *provide a platform* to engage in conversations where understanding and mutual respect are promoted. Their concerns and questions cannot be left unattended if we want them to develop a *sticky faith* as they transit into adulthood. It is an *art and skill* we need to develop in this postmodern

world. But it all starts with our willingness to *patiently listen intently* to gain *understanding* rather than to be *quick to offer solution or rebuttal*.

### **Biblical Principles to Develop a Discipleship Approach for the Emerging Adults**

I have selected some Bible passages and narratives to draw examples and principles towards developing a discipleship approach for the emerging adults. These are Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (Moses and the second generation of Israelites), 1 Kings 19:19-21 (Elijah and Elisha), Jesus and the twelve disciples, and 2 Timothy 1:3-5 (Timothy, Lois and Eunice). Their unique relationships provide helpful insights in aiding discipleship and faith transmissions from one generation to another.

Faith transmission from a generation to another, finding the parallels for the present, and the factors or reasons that may result in attrition is the premise of the research. At the heart of practical theology is balancing biblical principles that are sound with practical applications, in a fast-changing urban world. If there is disparity and lack in our discipleship process, we need to engage it. What was useful in the past may have become outdated in our approach when we disciple our young, has been compounded with the covid-19 pandemic.

Firstly, *the faith transmission injunction*. Prior to the conquest of the Promised Land, the second-generation Israelites were given a very specific command that has important consequences to their wellbeing and future in the land. It was of utmost importance that their very lives and continued prosperity depended on the successive generations adherence to it, that this command was given:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life (Deuteronomy 6:1-2).

It was without a doubt that faith transmission was placed as the premium in the lives of the generations preceding those who perished in the wilderness. Their bitter lessons the forefathers experienced were to be taught and remembered so that it will go well with

them as they possessed the land. All means and approaches were to be employed to “impress them” on future generations (Deuteronomy 6:7). So, the mandate for faith transmission was strongly emphasized for the wellbeing of their children and the welfare of the nation under God’s rule. The emphasis on family faith transmission can be seen, using every means available, in whatever occasions and situations daily, in very informal ways.

Secondly, *passing the mantle paradigm*. In the narrative of Elijah and Elisha, we observe a master-disciple relationship at play. God gave a direct command to Elijah to “anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed” him as prophet (1 Kings 19:16b). This command came at the back of Elijah’s victorious battle with the prophets of Baal, his flight because of the death threat by Jezebel, and personal crisis of faith. The act of transferring the prophetic anointing was initiated by God, and Elijah was directed accordingly. Elijah’s act of seeking him out in the Desert of Damascus and throwing his cloak over Elisha was keenly symbolic of carrying out God’s directive as “the prophet’s cloak was sign of the prophet’s vocation so that throwing it to him was a symbol of the call to the prophetic office” (Keil & Delitzsch 1996 Vol. 3, 183).

Elisha’s response was reflective of that understanding when he ran after Elijah to obtain permission to bid his parents farewell, burning his bridge behind him and followed after Elijah, and became his servant (1 Kings 19:19-20). It was not an ambiguous understanding or meaning to that act. It was about transmission of faith, a master to the student. On this score, transmission of faith was not an afterthought. It needed to be communicated clearly by the communicator, received, and decoded by the recipient accurately. It was mandated in Deuteronomy, and now seen in the prophetic circle. Elisha’s request to “inherit a double portion of your spirit” (2 Kings 2:9) was indicative of a father-son relationship where the first born received twice the inheritance than other sons (Deuteronomy 21:17). While it may not necessarily mean double Elijah’s spiritual powers, it should be noted that Elisha performed double the recorded number of the supernatural acts in comparison with Elijah. While the mantle was passed on, the demonstration of their prophetic call and faith varied in accordance to the desire expressed.

Thirdly, *head, heart, hands, heritage paradigm*. Jesus called His first disciples (Matt 4:18ff; Mark 1:16ff; Luke 5:1ff), instructing them to leave behind their vocations. In

the approximate three years, He lived with them (Mk 3:14), travelled to various places to proclaim the kingdom of God. He taught them from parables and everyday object lessons (Matt 5:1; Mk 4:2), demonstrated and showed them *how* to serve by His own examples (Matt 19:13-15; Jn 13:5), sent them off on assignments (Matt 10:1; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16), and commanded them to continue making disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19). He not only informed their heads, but impacted their hearts (Matt 26:6-1). He taught them hands-on by demonstrating to the discipleship, and to continue to make disciples until He returns – to pass on the heritage. This was the same paradigm Paul taught the Philippians: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me – put it into practice” (Phil 4:9).

Fourthly, *faith transmission through generations*. 2 Tim.1:1-3 gives an example that is very clear. Three generations are listed here - grandmother, mother and son. Paul’s prayer reiterated his service and ministry as a continuum from his ancestors. Paul highlighted this in his prayer how he was “reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” While the emphasis was the *sincere faith* that is tangible, it does not necessarily mean that it is looking exactly like each other. It has to be assumed that with the passage of time, gender difference, age difference et cetera, spirituality and faith expression may look different. Still Paul’s comment does point to the essence of sincere faith was demonstrable regardless the generation gap.

This is reflected in the emerging adult responses on the religiosity of their family, close friends and other adults. Four high points were recorded. Forty-four or 72.1% said that their mother is involved in church, with thirty-six or 59% stating that their father is involved in church. Siblings’ and friends’ involvement in church also influenced the emerging adults at forty-one or 67.2% and forty-three or 70.5% respectively. Intergeneration role and influence are crucial factors in faith transmission in discipleship approach for the emerging adults.

Religious influences and experiences also played a role as they were growing up. Religion as a topic of conversation in the family at forty or 65.6% individuals, while thirty-four or 55.7% were comfortable asking questions about religion or moral issues at home. Religious practices like praying together stood at thirty-two or 52.5%. Doing

life in the family context and in the faith community should be given serious attention in any discipleship approach.

Fourthly, *on sacraments, significance, and intentionality*. From the online survey, it was clear that those who were baptized young in comparison to when they were older showed disparity in connecting the rite, and therefore significance to their faith. Of the fifty-two descriptions or comments on water baptism, thirty were either neutral or not significant in comparison to twenty-two who felt it was significant (see *Table 2: Water baptism experience*). The symbolism and intention have to be clearly tied together to convey the meaning and significant of their experiences. Age factor affects ability to understand and is a key consideration for meaningful transmission of faith. Elisha understood the action and meaning of Elijah's action in throwing his cloak around Elisha. Elisha connected with the action and intention which resulted in his decision to say farewell to his parents and follow Elijah.

On the baptism of the Holy Spirit, thirty-five of the forty-two responses received indicated significance to their spiritual experiences. It was more meaningful in comparison with the experience of water baptism (see *Table 3: Baptism in the Holy Spirit Experience*). It should be noted that in water baptism a youth could apply to participate as a planned event. On the other hand, baptism in the Holy Spirit was an experience they had to pursue and desire persistently (Luke 11:5-13), not a formal application made in the church. What separates the two is the desire that signals their intentionality and spiritual significance of the experience. The key is in creating an environment conducive in desiring a personal spiritual experience. In the conversations with the pastors, there has not been intentional emphasis on this aspect even though these are AG churches. In the past, this has been emphasized in every church service, and altar calls given to pursue and experience it. But this is no longer the case, and very much relegated to special meetings like in church camp, youth camp et cetera. Menzies aptly points out that the "challenge to the contemporary church – a church that has all too often lost sight of its apostolic calling and charismatic roots" is to "remind us of our calling and our need for divine enabling," to reflect our identity as a Spirit-filled community (2016, 40).

## Way Forward for Emerging Adults Theologically Express their Spirituality and Faith in a Post-Modern Environment

Firstly, *addressing tough questions in the postmodern world that is fast changing and fluid*. Expressing a theological faith that is scripturally coherent is an important task at hand. Just as cartridge recorder became obsolete, replaced by the tape recorder, subsequently compact disc, then the thumb drive and external hard disk; so are meaningful and relevant expressions of faith and practice needful with such changes. The emerging adults surveyed revealed the impact of religious influences and experiences at home to be very impactful. Sixty-five point six percent have conversations on religion, while 55.7% were comfortable asking questions about religion or moral issues. In the focus groups, it was highlight by participant FG#07 that “the church is afraid to deal with uncomfortable questions” i.e. subject of lesbianism. Another participant FG#08 did not like about “the lack of diversity in faith.” This was in reference on “choosing the decision to rationally disagreeing the idea of God” or “not enough evidence of it.” Participant FG#09 lamented “too many bad experiences from other people,” judgmental attitude and perception of other as “a bad person” because the tattooed body on a person. From the literature review, the emerging adults are passionate about social and environmental issues. Faith cannot be alienated with such concerns, and the church should have active engagement, a *faith that works* during social ills, human tragedies, environmental disasters et cetera. Powell says that the number one reason youth leave the church is the tough questions about what is happening in the world. She stressed, “It’s not doubt that is toxic, but unexpressed or unexplored doubt that is toxic,” that “the church and my faith is out of touch with the world” (Hess 2021).

Secondly, nurturing faith through an intentional support system through intergenerational relationship. The value of intergenerational emphasis in the community of faith should be looked at more seriously. There should be more intentional approach to apply the intergenerational element to discipleship approach. Participants in the focus groups highlighted their appreciation and agreement on the need for different ages and generations so that they could learn from each other. They stressed the importance of having different ages in the church, that intergenerational

connection with a good proportion and mix help in transitioning upwards into the next phase of life.

For instance, the D6 view of youth ministry emphasized “generational discipleship lived out through both the church and the home,” an approach which involves “integrating leadership from both church and home to disciple current and future generations.” The church is viewed as “the theological anchor, training ground, and resource centre for discipleship” in equipping parents to disciple their children (Clark 2015, 148). The foundation idea derived from Deuteronomy Six commands us “that we are to love God, love his Word, and teach our kids to do the same,” where “the best lessons come from natural interactions during everyday life, much the way Jesus used parables to teach his disciples” (151). The emphasis on “transformational leadership” to encourage and enable life transformation, by investing “in followers to teach them how to want to make solid decisions on their own” raises a good point that we must “never confuse conformity with commitment” and that “programs meant to encourage and maintain faith can feel a lot like commitments at camp that are powerful in the moment but can be hollow over time” (155-158). The focus groups findings reveal that church “being an additional family,” “church is like a family” and good models were what draws them and keeps them in the church.

The aspect of doing life as a practical expression of their faith with the intentional involvement of parents and family in partnership with the church should be seriously considered, and not relegated to the church. Intentional involvement does not mean active involvement as time and space are limited. Being intentional suggests realigning values and priorities. It may mean less is more in church ministry approach and programming. What is crucial is the intensity and purpose. It should reshape aspects of church life to reflect those priorities. The institutionalized church form may have elements posing as stumbling blocks for the emerging adults since they have grown up in the church environment. What more, the emphasis should better reflect the gathered rather than the locale of the church. With the passage of time, even the contemporary church and the emergent church will at some point in the future become an institutional church. But that is not reason or excuse enough not to refresh, renew and refocus with the pace of our world today. Our ability to help emerging adults to express their Christian faith theologically coherent with scriptural mandate is a crucial element in the discipleship approach. The mandate till all “grow to become in every aspect the mature

body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15, NIV) remains true and needful.

Thirdly, connecting the significance and relationship of Christian sacraments with faith understanding and practice. As rightly pointed out, there should be the balance between the liturgical and contemporary since we are working among the young people (Clark 2015, 54). A faithful consistency with the preaching and teaching of the Word; encouragement to a deeper engagement in prayer, and the significance of the sacraments, especially baptism is needed. This is reflected in the emerging adults online survey which revealed the lack of prayer and appreciation for the act of baptism. For instance, while 95.1% surveyed has been baptized, 57.7% of the comments received reflected either a neutral or not significant experience. One key factor was the age when they were baptized.

While there should be fun incorporated within youth group meetings, the fact of the matter is that many young adults have gone through the youth fellowships, and are navigating the steeps of adulthood in a quantum leap of faith. Taking a cue from the Reformed View of Youth Ministry, “youth find it refreshing when a church is honest about what they believe and why they believe it—even the “offensive” elements of their theology.” By approaching discipleship with “do-whatever-it-takes” approach to ministry and worship, to keep them entertained will promote “this maxim: you keep them by how you attract them” instead of reinforcing the “approach that is consistent with what is practiced, where both approach and practice being informed and affirmed by Scripture” (40-42). The emphasis should be on the transformative grace of God through the ministry of the Word, prayer, the sacraments, gospel-motivated services, and the gospel community (43-52).

Fourthly, *connecting the focus on Jesus and the church program in daily lives of youth.* This concern was raised by the *Gospel Advancing View of Youth Ministry*, that “the modern youth ministry model has largely abandoned the focus of Jesus and delivers, instead, a series of competing programs...exchanged mission for meetings...separated evangelism and discipleship...turned outreach into a program instead of a lifestyle” (4). Instead of equipping the teenagers to share their faith, and building their lives with life transforming stories with the gospel at the heart of it (11), the church seems to assume

that the youth are capable to handle life's complexities when many are trying to navigate transition as they emerge into adulthood.

Developing a discipleship approach should consider "how developmental differences between the early, middle, and late adolescent (or emerging adult) affect how messages and data are received, stored, and employed, especially in terms of the brain and the social environment" (57). The retention rate and appreciation of its significance varies in tandem with their age. This correlates with the online survey which suggests that the older you are, the better is the comprehension and significance like, for example, water baptism. In many of the AG churches, there is a disconnect between the various services offered by the church. The segregation is well-intended - to minister relevant to the age segments. However, it has disassociated the young with the old, the mix of mutual experiences in worship, participation in the services et cetera. This exacerbates the divide and devalues the intergenerational element crucial in the life of the church. Some things are caught rather than taught!

The data through the online survey and focus groups supports an intentional team approach between the youth minister and the leaders, in collaboration with parents of the youth. According to the *D6 view*, by coaching parents to be coaches, it fosters intergenerational ties which will be more effective and sustainable. This approach "underscores the importance of children's ministry and its necessary bridge to youth ministry," expanding "the traditional youth ministry paradigm from an isolated program to a more developmentally appropriate spiritual formation continuum" (172).

Fifthly, *creating relational connection in the body life of the church*. The *Adoption View of Youth Ministry* approach aptly postulates that "the goal of ministry" is to "present a new way of thinking about the church for everyone" by shifting "away from segmenting young people off from everyone else to offering them a mutual, empowering, engaging, and supportive new family" (82-85). As suggested by the survey among the emerging adults, a sense of belonging is a positive factor in the church life and experience. The role of the church is "in recognising and participating in God's declaration that in Christ we have been called 'children of God'" (John 1:12) and to provide "the biblical foundation for the inclusion of young people into the core of the Christian community" (p. 11).

In the two focus groups, it was highlighted the emerging adults liked the aspect of the church as being like a family and the intergenerational connections of various age segments. They talked about the influence and impact of the older generation of youth who are now young adult in their lives. It helps them in the transition from youth into adulthood, through the phase of emerging adulthood. So “youth ministry as adoption is best conceived as a bridge ministry intent on moving the young beyond peer-experienced faith by leading them into the welcoming arms of the adoptive family of faith” (Clark 2015, 88).

It was pointed out that “for the past half-century, then, youth ministry has primarily focused on adults building relationships with teenagers for the purpose of helping “each and every young person grow personally and spiritually” (78). There is significant difference between the Baby Boomers and the Generation Y (and subsequent generations) towards discipleship. It should be noted that the young people are living in a world that “is more complex, competitive, and diverse. The conventional array of paths available to young adults has been exponentially multiplied. As a result, there is so much more to explore and navigate—whether they want to or not” (Powell 2016, Location1340).

### **Ministry Implications of Findings**

The findings support the assertion that we need a discipleship approach that is wide and flexible for the local church to address the attrition of emerging adults. It also supports the assertion that there is not a possibility of a one-size-fit-all solution. The interviews with pastors indicated a variety of strategies and approach taken by the AG churches. But we do need to incorporate the learning from the findings from the four research questions.

#### **Implications to Engaging Emerging Adults**

Firstly, *there is the need to realign and adjust how church is done*. Findings show that *felt, personal spiritual experiences* were needful. Three significant religious experiences were highlighted: 75.4% on feeling the presence of God, 70.5% on answered prayer, and 57.4% on miracles or healing. In the current pandemic, physical

buildings and structures have been exposed to be *a non-essential item*. The question is *how* to create similar conditions or environment in the absence of physical gathering. The *dynamism* of a gathered body of believers is missing as churches are grappling with online presence *in lieu* of physical presence in a location, something unthinkable pre-covid-19 factor. The buzzword is a *hybrid church* where both the online and physical presence has gained greater traction in the last one and a half years. Doing church has been *permanently* altered by the pandemic. Barna's survey reveals only 35% are still attending their pre-Covid-19 church, 14% have switched churches, while 32% have stopped attending church during Covid-19, and another 18% viewing multiple churches throughout the month (Barna 2020). With the imposition of social health protocols, gathering in big numbers physically is being challenged, or viewed not viable at least in the mid-term until the pandemic can be dealt with decisively. There is light at the end of the tunnel with some countries viewing and approaching covid-19 as an *endemic* issue. Coping with a new *abnormal* in social interaction has raised issues on *how* to do church in an endemic way.

Secondly, *the use e-media will be most prominent*, and is right up in the alley of the emerging adults. The pastors interviewed were very glad of the active involvement of the emerging adults in ensuring live broadcast and e-media contents. They felt that during this time of pandemic, the activities of the church have been girded by the emerging adults. The church may need re-skill and adapt to engage the emerging adults with communication tools like zoom, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook et cetera. The future outlook of the church for the present and future generations of youth and emerging adults hinges on our ability to create similar *koinonia* or fellowship via the *hybrid church*. It would be foolish to wait for church to go back to the *old normal*.

Thirdly, *the connection of Christian practices, the symbolism and significances need to be intentional and clearly understood*. The second and subsequent generations of Christians whose reference while growing in the church environment cannot be assumed to appreciate their Christian heritage. Discipling them must be reshaped and their significance to their spiritual experience meaningful and nurturing. The African maxim, "It takes a village to raise a child" brings home an important point for the faith community. "An entire community of people must provide for and interact positively with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment" (Wikipedia 2022).

The holistic involvement of the faith community in the church life is paramount to a living experience of a child right through adolescence, emerging adult phase adulthood. Whether it is in worship setting, fellowship over a meal, baptism event, camp or retreat, Christian practices and symbolism should be amplified as a communal experience. This connection fosters greater appreciation and meaning for nurturing faith as revealed from the survey. For instance, on the perception of the church (Chart G09a), if we can impact them positively, their perception in those categories would rise significantly. Imagine the scenario where parents and children, young and old, actively participate in the worship and service. The cross impact and bonding would be significant as mutual encouragement creates multiplier effects on the entire congregation.

### Implications to the Congregation

Firstly, *intergenerational elements are fully harnessed*. The findings revealed the importance and role of intergenerational relationships in the life of the church. The energies from the young and emerging adults will fuel the life and atmosphere of the congregation. When acceptance and a sense of belonging are realized, the vibe can be felt throughout the congregational life. I remember a scene from a nursing home facility I visited some years ago. The mere presence of young adults and youth brought a sense of joy and lifted the spirits of the aged inhabitants. The benefits were not one-sided. A debrief after the visit reported a sense of personal joy and satisfaction to each participants. In our recently ten days food aid initiative in July 2021, it brought a tremendous sense of Christian unity and love when members, friends and others began to give to the initiative. The messages received were so uplifting in the midst of a national lockdown. The opportunity to be a part of helping others brought personal edification and satisfaction. The volunteers and contributors came from a mixed of the young and old. When there is a purpose and singular focus, synergy takes place. It also drew in support from other churches in Sunway – Subang environment which contributed financially and openness for future collaboration.

Secondly, *faith and vision are renewed*. When people sense a purpose and experience the impact made, it refreshes and renews. When the whole church gets involved, everyone gets reminded as a community. It is lived out beyond the teaching and instructional dimension. This is especially true for the emerging adults seeking to make

sense and impact as a Christian in a challenging postmodern world. While it may require great tolerance, greater engagement will yield better understanding. Vision is restated, faith is challenged and renewed.

### Implications to Discipleship Approach

Firstly, *the holistic involvement of the body of Christ*. Discipleship cannot be relegated to the church like the current practice. Findings show that parental (72.1% mothers, 59% fathers), siblings (67.2%) and close friends (70.5%) who are involved in church affect the emerging adults' participation in the church. The *D6 view* of engaging parents and other adults in the process are crucial elements for a fuller and more lasting impact on the spiritual practices and experience of emerging adults. It has to be a cohesive plan beginning with the children, reaching to the adults. Departments can no longer operate in silos, and hope for a better outcome. More engagement and synergistic effort are needed to make a good discipleship approach.

Secondly, *the ownership factor*. Intergenerational relationships are important ingredients. The findings reveal that parents, siblings, friends and others helped emerging adults become more responsible and reliable. When they have to be accountable *for* someone under their care, they learn and experience the meaning of responsibility. When they have to be accountable *to* someone, they learn submission and discipline. As they serve and are being served, the two directional impact occurs. Being a part of the family of God, experiencing belongingness together, perpetuates Christian identity, affection, and loyalty. The findings from the survey and focus groups support this.

### Evaluation of the Study

The project is focused on the demographic of emerging adults in six AG churches in the Sunway – Subang, Malaysia. Together, they present a *biopic* view of the challenges faced by urban churches on the attrition of emerging adults. While these findings reflect the English speaking churches, because of the urban environment and the fast-paced changes taking place in the postmodern world, it will have greater impact on the AG churches as a whole. This is because many of the language speaking congregation

(Chinese, Tamil, Bahasa Malaysia et cetera) are birthed and form a part of the local English-speaking congregation. There are very few language churches that were pioneered in the history of AG Malaysia. This study does not cover these language churches per se. Moreover, their cultural difference and leadership paradigm are dissimilar to the English-speaking churches. The Chinese AG churches are currently the growing segment of the AG churches. Their growth and expansion reflected the early days of AG Malaysia which grew out of our churches that were pioneered with children and youth as their congregants.

I have intentionally avoided presenting a discipleship model, realizing that every AG church is unique and employs varying strategies relevant to their church culture and strength. From the learnings, I have reached a conclusion that a one-size-fit-all discipleship approach as unfeasible. While I have referred to the five-current view of youth ministry, nevertheless these are very much Western based paradigms. An Asian response to the attrition of emerging adults is very much needed as this issue has similarities and dissimilarities with the western counterpart. More conversations reflective of the Asian experience should take place soon as the global reach of e-media and e-learning are present realities. The issues that have emerged in the West like LGBTQ, environmental concerns, human rights et cetera are reaching our Asian shores faster. For instance, Taiwan has become a friendly country to the LGBTQ agenda. Even in Malaysia, some multinational companies have certain requirements imposed on the culture of the organization supporting such thorny issues in a Muslim majority country like Malaysia.

I began this study with the assumption and concerns of the attrition of emerging adults in AG churches. My conclusion supports the assumption that the western experience was like what we are facing. I was thankful for the responses from the survey, focus groups and personal interviews, which were positive and engaging. Among the emerging adults, they were interested to expand this study beyond the Sunway-Subang setting as they felt their friends from other locales were also interested in this study.

### **Future Directions for the Study**

The scope of this research project covers the aspect of developing an approach to the discipleship process to address the attrition of emerging adults' population in the AG

churches in Sunway – Subang, Malaysia. The study included identifying the perception of emerging adults about God, the church and their faith, was limited to certain parameters as it was specific to the AG churches in a specific locale. Further study is recommended in the following three areas, the local church, the AG churches in Sunway - Subang, and AG fellowship.

### The Local Church

Firstly, relook and rework a master plan of discipleship in the local church. Harris states “the forms of church life as a whole curriculum” as crucial in the book of Acts (1989, 14). These activities are “kerygma, proclaiming the word of Jesus’ resurrection; didache, the activity of teaching; leiturgia, coming together to pray and to re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread; *koinonia*, or community; and *diakonia*, caring for those in need” (16). It should emphasize the *Head, Heart, Hand, Heritage paradigm* so that alignment of church life experiences is not compartmentalized. It should incorporate present day communication app and tools with a view of finding balance for social interaction and fellowship - physically and digitally, and connecting Christian practices and significances at every level of church life.

Secondly, strategize a holistic engagement among each segment and department or ministry where planning is not from a silo-mentality approach. Instead, there is continuity and overlaps reduced. *Less can be more* when crafted intentionally the church activities or events, spiritual experiences in services, retreat et cetera. Interaction platforms and conversations should be inclusive, not exclusive to specific leadership tiers. This will enhance *body life* experiences and interaction with this hope: “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Thirdly, the impact of Covid-19 on emerging adults’ participation in local church during the endemic stage. The relevance of physical gathering, *hybrid church*, fellowship et cetera needs to be evaluated. However, this has to be done without compromising biblical foundations and coherence.

### Sunway – Subang AG Churches

Firstly, a research to ascertain the specific challenges faced by emerging adults in this current environment. It can identify sociological, psychological, and spiritual shift as a direct result of the pandemic.

Secondly, inter-network initiative among churches. Expanding the study to synergies an emerging adult discipleship platform for a targeted setting i.e. Sunway – Subang area can yield greater benefits to the community of faith. This should include resource sharing, church community-based action plans, mimicking unity in diversity. The collaboration among these churches can enhance greater fellowship among the emerging adults. It can promote unity and a sense of belonging to a greater network of believers. In turn, it can strengthen a sense of identification to a bigger community of faith beyond their respective church walls.

### AG Fellowship

Firstly, the national departments and institutions like Children, Youth Alive and BCM could work more closely and cohesively to develop a discipleship process that covers the broad framework of these age gaps. This has been hampered by the lack of dialogue among these entities to develop a unified approach for AG churches in Malaysia.

Perhaps, the strength of the fellowship - *self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting* ministry approach - has a flip side which work against a unified approach to this issue. The EXCO can encourage, but cannot coerce the autonomous AG churches to cooperate unlike some denominational church structures.

Secondly, the Christian education agenda of the AG Malaysia needs revitalizing. It should move away from a narrow Sunday school focus. Instead, a more comprehensive, coherent, and dynamic approach towards discipleship be done.

### Conclusion of the Study

The process of developing a discipleship approach to address the attrition of the emerging adults in the AG churches is not the task of certain segment of the congregation. Any attempts to do so without full engagement of the body would be

inadequate. The takeaway from this study is that a successful discipleship approach must encompass the holistic involvement of the church, integrating every level of church life - beginning with children, youth, emerging adults, and adults. Good transitioning ought to take place at every level of church life and ministry. One cannot expect good transition from one phase to another unless a well-crafted mechanism has been put in place.

Therefore, the transitions from children ministry into youth ministry, subsequently into emerging adulthood, and finally the adult phase have to be planned and prayerfully thought through. The task is tedious, but the rewards would be worth it. Generations of believers, whether from first generation converts or second or third generations brought up in Christian environment will have transformational discipleship experience.

The aim of sticky faith is paramount to our goal in Christian education and discipleship. Understanding the issues and factors contributing to this phenomenon is the basic task at hand. Finding workable solution to the problem then becomes the ensuing focus and objective as we re-craft an approach that takes consideration of the important elements learned from the survey, focus groups, and interviews. It should not be only the local church *intuitive response*.

Rather, intra and inter networking of churches with the national council of the AG may yield better results. This does not mean abandoning the *three-self principle* of the AG local church structure. Rather, reshaping vital ecclesiastical relationships within AG churches and with the General Council brings greater cohesiveness and synergy beneficial to the future of the local church and fellowship. It is in laying down one's life that one can take it up again with greater impact and resolution.

It calls for a strategic plan of action both at the local church and the general body of the AG. Holistic engagement is no longer a luxury for consideration. Full engagement is needful for rebuild, reshaping and renewing the present and future church in the post-modern world.

As a researcher, I have gained much learning from this project. I am better appreciative of the struggles and challenges faced by the emerging adults. The burning question from more than three decades ago has been the catalyst for this study. Presumptions and assumptions were challenged, and arriving at a humbling revelation: we all need

God's grace to do it well and for His glory. A pastoral heart does not excuse the need to engage the emerging adults in a meaningful way. Shifting from *prescribing* to *describing* has been a positive learning curve these past six years of the doctoral programme. I must humbly admit to what has always been, we do not know or have all the answers. I do not think it was meant to be anyway.

But the excitement from discovering *together* in this faith journey with fellow brothers and sisters reminds me of one central need - we need to depend on God's grace. To that end, I have become a better person. At the conclusion of this research, I am again catapulted to the day of my BCM graduation, 20 November 1990. Speaking at that graduation, I quoted the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi which still holds truth three decades later:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

My deepest appreciation to my supervisor whose input, encouragement and prayer brought me to the finishing line. The emerging adults who participated in the survey and focus groups helped reshape my personal understanding of faith and pastoral theology. The interviews with pastors and national leaders have added greater insights and value to this project. More precious, the pioneer cohorts of this DMin journey enlarged my worldview and appreciation for various Christian traditions and heritage. We did life together. We have disciplined each other. We became good friends. We became family.

### **Review of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the learnings from this research are stated. The interpretations from the findings, implications, and recommendations to develop a discipleship approach were presented. It does not present a model. Rather, the elements that are needed as ingredients to develop a discipleship process to address the attrition of emerging adults in the AG churches in Sunway – Subang, Malaysia were highlighted.

“Ministry precedes and determines not only theological reflection but the very existence and life of the church” (Anderson 2001, 71). It is possible to properly address the phenomenon affecting our emerging adults (and youth). This research revealed that we need a broader discipleship framework which can be adapted into local congregations. It should not be a one-size-fit-all approach. This is not possible given the various factors unique to any given settings. It is the view of this writer that the work should start soonest possible.

The findings and recommendations will be forwarded to the CDC and EXCO to initiate dialogue and activate an action plan for AG churches. This in itself is a step for renewal of the AG Malaysia sixty years on. The congregations in the AG churches have a unique opportunity to restate and reiterate their fundamental beliefs and practices that were vibrant and brought rapid growth in the early days of its inception. I pray the prayer of Habakkuk, “LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2).

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### GENERAL ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Thank you for considering participating in my study! I appreciate you giving your insights and time. Please read the separate Participant Information Sheet before you proceed with the survey.

#### Participant Information Sheet

(Please click this link for fuller information)

This study is aimed at 19 – 29 years olds across AG Malaysia churches who “were raised Christian” and/or attended church monthly or more for at least a year as a youth. **If you are not 19-29 years old, please do not complete this questionnaire.**

This survey will take between 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

Submitting the survey will be considered as your consent to participate.

Read the survey carefully and answer all the questions accordingly.

Upon completion of the survey, submit the electronic document at the end.

G01. Are you aged 19 – 29 years old?

- Yes
- No. (If no, please do not complete this questionnaire).

G02. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

G03. What is your ethnic background?

- Chinese
- Indian
- Other:(Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

G04. I am a:

- 1<sup>st</sup> generation Christian (my parents are non-Christians)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Christian (at least one of my parents is Christian)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Christian (at least one of my parents and one of my grandparents are Christians)

G05. I am a:

- Male  
 Female

### Faith and Church Participation

*Childhood refers to as early as you can remember until approximately age 12. Teen refers approximately to ages 13 to 19.*

G06. Tell me about your church participation. How often do you go to church?

- 1–2 times a month  
 3 or more times a month  
 Weekly & one or more services  
 Seldom or No longer

G07. Tell me about the size of the congregation of the church you are attending (or attended growing up). (This is inclusive of children, youth & adults)

- 1–50  
 51–100  
 101 – 200  
 201 – 400

G08. Which statements below reflect your present perception of faith in God? *You may tick more than one item. Also, please indicate up to 3 from your list closest to your present perception by a tick in the box next to that statement.*

- I have experienced closeness with God
- I feel lost about my faith
- I pray to God
- I talk about my faith to others
- I believe Jesus is the only way to God (exclusive)
- I feel that good work is needful for my salvation
- I don't have a good understanding of my faith
- I am unsure if I am a Christian
- I know God plays a big role in my life
- I have memories of experiencing God
- I no longer ascribe to the Christian faith
- I am considering other faith/religion
- I think there are other ways to know God
- (Christianity is not exclusive)
- Other (Please summarize) \_\_\_\_\_

G09. Which statements below reflect your perception of your church? *You may tick more than one item. Also, please indicate up to 3 from your list closest to your present perception by a tick in the box next to that statement.*

- I like to attend church services
- I go to church because of my family
- I have a sense of belonging in church
- I go to church because I have friends there
- I am actively serving in church as a volunteer
- I experienced acceptance in the church
- I enjoy worship in church services

- I enjoy my pastor's preaching
- I enjoy the fellowship in church
- I have been hurt by church members
- I have a positive view of my church
- I don't have a good view of my church
- Other (Please summarize)\_\_\_\_\_

G10. Which statements below reflect your understanding of Christian beliefs? *You may tick more than one item. Also, please indicate up to 3 from your list closest to your present perception by a tick in the box next to that statement.*

- I enjoy the teaching, bible class, Sunday school of my church
- I believe that Christian discipleship is important in my life
- I believe that good teaching is needful for my faith development
- I find Christian teachings hard to apply
- I believe that Bible teaching is important to nurture spiritual development
- I don't enjoy reading the Bible
- The Bible is one source of information to know God
- The teachings of the church are not relevant for today
- I believe that having good Christian beliefs is foundational to faith
- I believe that what we beliefs leads to how we live
- I am not well verse in what in my Christians beliefs
- I don't have deep knowledge of the Bible
- Other (Please summarize)\_\_\_\_\_

Q11. Tell me about your own private religious practices

- How often do you do personal prayers?
  - Daily
  - 1-3 times in a week
  - 4-6 times in a week
  - Less than once a week
  - I don't do personal prayer
- Do you do personal Bible reading?
  - Daily
  - 1-3 times in a week
  - 4-6 times in a week
  - Less than once a week
  - I don't do personal Bible reading
- Do you do personal devotional time?
  - Daily
  - 1-3 times in a week
  - 4-6 times in a week
  - Less than once a week
  - I don't do personal devotional time

Q12. Can you recall any significant religious experiences growing up?

- Feeling the presence of God
- Answered prayers

- Miracles or healings
- Others:(specify)\_\_\_\_\_

Q13. Have you experienced what some people use conversion to speak of an encounter with God, a kind of spiritual awakening?

- Yes
- No

Q14. Have you experienced water baptism?

- Yes. If yes, please describe it. \_\_\_\_\_
- No

Q15. Have you experience baptism in the Holy Spirit?

- Yes. If yes, please describe it. \_\_\_\_\_
- No

Q16. I have: (please tick each statement true of your experience)

- Attended religious camps
- Join short-term missions
- Taught Sunday School
- Participated in church events like church camps, choirs, drama, Vacation Bible School etc.

Q17. Looking back on your church experience as a youth would you describe yourself then as more of a:

- SPECTATOR (where things were done for you)
- PARTICIPANT (where your gifts and talents were developed and appreciated)

Q18. Religious influences and experiences in your home growing up (tick if "Yes")

- Religion a topic of conversation
- Comfortable asking questions about religion or moral issues at home
- Pray together or do other religious practices as a whole family at home

Q19. Religiosity of your family members, close friends and other adults (please tick if "Yes")

- Mother is involved in church.
- Mother performs private religious practices.
- Father is involved in church.
- Father performs private religious practices.
- Sibling(s) is involved in church.
- Sibling(s) performs private religious practices.
- Close friends are involved in church and private religious practices.

Q20. The statement that best represents your present religious affiliation and church activity:

- I consider myself a Christian.
- I do not consider myself a Christian.

Q21. The statement that best represents your church activity now:

- I attend church monthly or more frequently. Please proceed to questions **Q20A**.

- I attend church less than monthly. Please proceed to questions **Q20B**.

**Respondent Attends Church Monthly or More Frequently**

Q21A. Which of the reasons that young adults stay in church do you identify with?  
(Indicate with a tick any of the statements that are true for you)

- Church is a vital part of my relationship with God.  
 I want the church to help me guide my decisions in daily life.  
 I feel the church is helping me become a better person.  
 I want to follow a parent's or family members example.  
 I am committed to the purpose and work of the church.  
 Church initiatives are a big part of my life.  
 Church is helping me through a difficult part in my life.  
 I am afraid of living a life without spiritual guidance.  
 My closest friends attend the same church  
 Other factors (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Respondent Attends Church less than Monthly**

Q21B. Which of the reasons have contributed to your church attendance less than monthly.

- I simply wanted a break from church  
 Church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical  
 I moved to college and stopped attending  
 Work responsibilities prevented me from attending  
 Moved too far from church to continue attending  
 Became too busy, though still wanted to attend  
 Didn't feel connected to the people in the church  
 I disagreed with the churches stance on political or social issues  
 Chose to spend more time with friends outside of church  
 Was only going to church to please others  
 Other factors (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**CONCLUSION: All Respondents**

Q22. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school  
 High School  
 Trade School/Business School/College  
 University degree  
 Graduate university degree

Q23. Are you currently enrolled in a college or other institution of higher learning?

- Yes, currently an undergraduate student  
 Yes, currently a graduate student  
 No

Q24. At the colleges and/or universities you attended were you ever involved in a Christian group on campus?

- Yes
- No

*If yes*, describe the level of your involvement:

- Very involved
- Somewhat involved
- Seldom involved
- Others:(Please explain further)\_\_\_\_\_

Q25. Which of the following best describes your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Prefer not to say

Q26. Which of the following best represents your religious affiliation NOW?

- Roman Catholic Christian
- Protestant Christian
- Just 'Christian'
- A churchless Christian
- Muslim
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- None
- Other:(Please specify)\_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

## Appendix B

### **FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENT**

This focus group instrument is a set of questions designed to obtain their perception, opinion and comments that determine their decision to remain in the church and their participation in the local church.

#### **Probe Questions:<sup>1</sup>**

##### **QUESTIONS ON THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE CHURCH**

1. Is the church an important aspect in your life?
2. How often do you attend church services and programs?
3. What do you like most about your church?

#### **Follow-Up Questions:**

##### **QUESTIONS ON WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO DECISION TO STAY OR CONSIDER LEAVING**

4. What influences your decision to remain in your church?
5. What influences whether your friends to stay or come to your church?
6. What would you change about your church if you had the ability to do so?

##### **QUESTIONS ON WHAT REINFORCED OR ERODED THEIR FAITH DEVELOPMENT**

7. In your opinion, what would reinforce or erode your faith development?
8. In your opinion, do religious experiences like water baptism, baptism of the Holy Spirit, supernatural encounters with God build your faith?
9. In your opinion, what influences your faith positively?

#### **Exit Question**

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your church?

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<sup>1</sup> Concept of "Probe Questions, Follow-up Questions, Exit Question" from <https://humansofdata.atlan.com/2017/09/conduct-successful-focus-group-discussion/>

## Appendix C

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR PASTORS**

1. What is the approximate size of your congregation?
  - a. Briefly describe your church.
  - b. What are the key characteristics of your church?
  
2. What is the ratio of emerging adults in the church?
  - a. Do you have a specific fellowship for them in church?
  - b. Are you concerned about the ratio?
  - c. Are you or have you experienced them leaving your church?
  - d. What could be the reasons for their decision?
  
3. What are your concerns about the emerging adult in your church?
  - a. What are the key issues you faced?
  - b. Can you give some examples?
  - c. How will your church address them?
  
4. What is your view on the emerging adult's spirituality?
  - a. How would you describe their faith?
  - b. What is your church's approach to nurture / disciple them?
  
5. What do you see are their greatest needs in the context of your church?
  - a. How will you address it?
  - b. What do you see the role of the church in discipling them?

## Appendix D

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR BCM PRESIDENT**

1. Briefly describe the role of BCM in the context of training ministers and workers
  - a. What is the philosophy and approach?
  - b. Are there specialized courses that cater to training minister to work among/with emerging adults?
  
2. Is the college attracting the emerging adults for theological training?
  - a. What is the ratio of emerging adult students in the college?
  - b. How would you describe them as student?
  - c. Do these students demonstrate spiritual maturity reflective of their age?
  
3. In your opinion, how do they view their call to fulltime ministry?
  - a. In their admission interview, how do they describe their fulltime call?
  - b. Do you in them a sense of hunger and drive to contribute towards the work of God?
  
4. Do you see a need to train a specialized group of ministers to work among the emerging adults?
  - a. If yes, how would you do so?
  - b. If no, why?
  
5. Do you foresee a growth in more emerging adults students in BCM?
  - a. If yes, why?
  - b. What would influence their choice of BCM for the theological training?
  - c. If no, why?
  
6. What is your view on the future role and contribution of emerging adults in the local church, district and national councils?

## Appendix E

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR YOUTH ALIVE DIRECTOR**

1. Briefly describe the role of the national department of the Youth Alive
  - a. What are the core emphases?
  - b. How is it structured?
  
2. What is the demographic of youth / young adult in the AG churches nationally?
  - a. Is there an overlap of youth & youth adults in your program strategy?
  - b. Are there many churches with youth / young adult fellowship?
  
3. As a national department, how do you equip ministers who are working among the emerging adults?
  - a. What strategy has been mapped out?
  - b. How would you describe them as student?
  - c. Do these students demonstrate spiritual maturity reflective of their age?
  
4. Briefly describe the collaboration between the National YA with local churches.
  - a. Is there integration and cooperation?
  - b. What are the initiatives to strengthen and enhance youth groups in local churches?
  
5. What is your view of emerging adults in the current and future landscape of the local church, district and national councils?