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ABSTRACT

MINISTERING TO YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS THROUGH
A SPORTS INITIATIVE IN THE NORMANDIE AVENUE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Michael S. Jenkins Jr.

Adviser: Kendrick Curtis

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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Date completed: March 2019

Problem

The Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist church is centrally located among other nearby Seventh-day Adventist churches in south Los Angeles, California. The presence of youth and young adults in worship services has diminished. Ministry participation among this group at Normandie has also diminished. Adventist and non-Adventist youth and young adults are not being attracted to the church or its ministries. Youth and young adults who do attend worship service and or participate in ministries do not have a strong relationship with the pastor or other spiritual figures. A 2008 study shows the median age of Adventist congregations is 51 while United States census data show the median age of the Westmont neighborhood of south Los Angeles where Normandie is located is 25. Normandie's youth and young adult situation is a microcosm of the other area Seventh-day Adventist churches in the area.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to use the sport of basketball as a vehicle to bring a pastor or spiritual leader into proximity of youth and young adults. The pastor or spiritual leader can then develop healthy relationships with the young people and serve as a spiritual mentor. This spiritual mentoring relationship strengthened the spirituality of the participants and helped to increase the presence of youth and young adults in worship service. It also aided in the increase of participation among youth and young adults in the ministries of Normandie. This project provides a model for outreach, evangelism, and overall ministry to youth and young adults. This ensures that Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church is providing relevant and effective ministry to the community where it is located.

Method

The methodology included an open run of basketball for youth and young adults. This took place once a week for eight weeks. Spiritual disciplines were also taught to the youth and young adults who participated in the open run.

Results

The project was implemented as proposed. Youth and young adults participated. They were exposed to a spiritual environment during game play. They were taught the spiritual disciplines of prayer, bible study, devotion, and testimony. Relationships between youth and young adults and a spiritual mentor were formed.

Conclusion

The project has demonstrated that sports mixed with spirituality is an effective way to gain the interest of youth and young adults. It is an effective way to place spiritual mentors in proximity to the young people they are trying to reach. This project has also demonstrated that sports is an effective way to reach both churched and un-churched youth and young adults. This method of reaching youth and young adults can be combined with other approaches geared toward these demographics for a more complete and well-rounded ministry.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

MINISTERING TO YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS THROUGH
A SPORTS INITIATIVE IN THE NORMANDIE AVENUE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the
Degree Doctor of Ministry

by

Michael S. Jenkins Jr.

March 2019

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mother: Derenda Williams-Cooper who taught me about Jesus Christ at a young age, kept me in church, and raised me to be a God fearing responsible provider. I miss her much, may she rest till the day Christ comes again and we are reunited in everlasting joy!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist church is located in south Los Angeles. The church is located a few blocks north of the busy Los Angeles thoroughfare of El Segundo Boulevard. The congregation of Normandie Avenue church is predominantly Black. This is reflective of the neighborhood which is 51% Black, 44% Hispanic, with other groups making up the rest. This area has a median age of 25 yet the median age of the typical Adventist church is 51. While there are many youth and young adults living in the neighborhood of the church these demographics are not present in the church. Most of the neighborhood is comprised of youth and young adults. Forty-nine-point nine percent (49.9%) of households have residents under the age of 18. Twenty-nine-point one percent (29.1%) of residents are under the age of 18, while 11.7% are aged 18 to 24, and 26.1% are aged 25 to 44. The California median income is \$67,739 while it is only \$43,137 in the neighborhood where Normandie is located.

The church leadership team is generally comprised of Baby Boomers. There is only one person on the church board under the age of 35. Young people are under-represented in church leadership. They are also under-represented in attendance and participation in the worship services and ministries of Normandie Avenue church.

Statement of the Problem

Many Christian churches in North America have very few young adults who attend weekly service on a regular basis relative to other age groups. Roughly 28% of individuals age 18-30 claim to attend at least one religious service per week (*ABCnews.com*). This reality is very evident at the Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church, where very few young adults age 18-30 who grew up attending Normandie still attend. For those in this demographic who do attend services on a regular basis, very few have a relationship with the pastor or other spiritual leaders in the church. An absence of ministries focused on their needs has led to a lack of spirituality amongst this age group.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was to develop and implement a sports and recreation ministry at the Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church with a focus on spiritual disciplines. This ministry was tailored to urban youth and young adults who rarely attend church or who attended but are not active in church. This project was evaluated to determine its impact on increasing the church attendance and involvement of youth and young adults.

Justification for the Project

There are youth and young adults living in urban environments who choose not to attend church on a weekly basis for various reasons. Because of this, it is difficult for pastors, non-pastoral spiritual leaders, and ministry professionals to form relationships that have a spiritual impact on these individuals.

It is common for ministry professionals to conduct programs geared toward this age segment within churches, but these church-based programs are not reaching those who do not attend church. This project takes spiritual disciplines to a number of those who are not opposed to religious activities but would rather attend a sporting activity rather than a church program.

This program is a non-threatening way to gain access to youth and young adults who may be skeptical of attending a religious program at a Seventh-day Adventist church.

Description of the Project Process

The theological reflection centered on teaching spiritual disciplines so that youth and young adults can increase their spirituality. Current literature was reviewed. Primarily literature about using sports as an avenue for connecting with young adults and helping them grow in the practice of spiritual discipline was reviewed. Other literature reviewed included books and articles on ministry to youth, ministry to young adults, ministry in urban centers, and spiritual disciplines.

The main event of the program occurred once a week for a period of two hours. The project began in October 2012 and continued through May 2013. Youth and young adults gathered in a neighborhood gym for the sports activities. This two-hour period began with a devotion given by a pastor or another respected spiritual leader. There was time for prayer requests and a season of prayer so that those in attendance could share and hear the concerns of others. Also, ten members of the church were trained to build relationships with the young people, so that they might serve them as informal spiritual mentors.

A devotional/workbook which teaches spiritual disciplines was purchased and given to regular attendees. Reflection sessions took place periodically where the devotion and workbook was discussed in a group setting.

The program was evaluated by interviewing a select number of participants, and by tracking the increase in church attendance and involvement by the participants.

Expectations of the Project

It was intended that this project would encourage the building of relationships between youth/young adults and the pastor or spiritual mentor. Also, it was intended to provide spiritual mentorship of pastor or spiritual mentor to young person.

Further, it was hoped that it would increase the youth and young adult's practice of the spiritual disciplines of devotion, Bible study, and prayer.

It was also intended to increase the church attendance of the youth and young adult and to grow their presence and participation in worship services and ministries.

Definition of Terms

Attractional Model is a model of church and method of outreach that is founded in making the church service desirable to people who do not regularly attend church in order to draw them in.

Consistent Church Attendance is a phrase used to in reference to attending a regular weekend worship service at least twice a month.

Incarnational Model is a model of church and method of outreach this is founded in relating to people where they are, in essence taking to gospel to people.

Open Gym is the common name for this project.

Participant refers to the youth and young adults who play basketball and engage in the spiritual aspects of the project.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The church is biblically mandated to proclaim the Gospel to everyone and to care for the spiritual growth of all believers. This biblical mandate is seen in the book of Colossians which says, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). The Gospel is relevant to all believers who are equally important in the body of Christ. This understanding forms the foundation of the theological concepts that will be explored in this chapter which are: (a) That youth matter in God’s cause. (b) That God intends to use youth and young adults in a special way in the last days. (c) Youth and young adults are missing from church. (d) God searches for them. (e) Young people should be taught about God. (f) Young people have a place in the body of Christ. This chapter will also show (g) the characteristics of churches that appeal to youth and young adults. A Sports Initiative is a unique platform designed to minister to youth and young adults in a culturally distinct way.

Youth Matter in God’s Cause

The bible is replete with examples of young people that were used by God which indicates that youth matter in God’s cause. Josiah is a fitting example. He was eight years old when he became king and he ruled for 38 years. The Bible says, “And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he

did not turn aside to the right or to the left” (2 Kgs 22:2). This gives evidence that a positive spiritual impact on the life of a young person can have a lasting influence on them.

Josiah was king at age eight and God used him to enact great reform at a time when it was desperately needed. God did not wait until Josiah was older He used him while still very young and inexperienced. It would seem that age does not deter God. Josiah’s life is a testament to that fact.

The fifth commandment found in Exodus 20:12 is another biblical example of youth mattering to God. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Exod 20:12). While this commandment can apply to all ages since parents are parents no matter what age their child are, since children become aware of their parents in their youth, this commandment first becomes applicable in one’s youth. Not only is it a commandment, but it also contains a promise--that God will grant a healthy number of days to those who give honor to their parents. This is the first commandment to address human-to-human relationships. It is interesting that God would place the parent-child relationship first in the order of the six commandments that deal with human-to-human relationships. While all the commandments are important, placing this commandment as the first of the six seems to indicate that the respect of children to their parents has special significance. It may be that if children first learn to respect their parents that this same respect will show itself in all other relationships. This only strengthens the case that youth matter to God. So much so that the first commandment that addresses human-to-human relationships is placed first among the six because God wants youth to first learn to respect their parents

so that this same respect will spill over into all other human-to-human relationships as well. Furthermore, while the second and third commandments have a negative incentive to encourage people to keep them, this is the only commandment with a positive incentive. The fifth commandment is to honor one's parents in order to reap the benefit of long life. Providing a positive incentive for doing His will is one of the ways we see how much youth matter to God. In this instance, it includes the blessing of a long life.

This is seen again in how God commanded the Hebrew parents to teach them about Him and His will. In Deuteronomy chapter 5, God reiterates the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, God commands the Hebrew parents to share these commandments with their children and to place them in conspicuous places in the household for all to see and be reminded. It states:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:6-9)

Youth matter so much to God that Jesus makes it a point to show others that they matter. In Matthew 19 young people are brought before Jesus but His disciples try to turn them away. Jesus shows how important these young people are in verses 13-15,

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, 14 but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' 15 And he laid his hands on them and went away. (Matt 19:13-15)

While one might suggest any number of reasons why the disciples turned these young people away, whatever the reason was, Jesus used the opportunity to show His disciples and everyone else present that youth mattered to Him. This is further reflected in that way

that Jesus not only allowed them to come close to Him, He also laid His hands on them. In this display of His love for youth, Jesus, alluding to the innocence and trust of youthfulness, likened the Kingdom of Heaven to them. Heaven is believed to be a special place. Likening the Kingdom of Heaven to young people seems to be one more way in which Jesus Christ shows how they are special.

Matthew 18:10-14 sets forth the theme of God searching for the missing and the lost. Verse 2 of Matthew 18 gives the context of this particular passage when Jesus uses a child as the foundation for the points He makes to His disciples about the Kingdom of Heaven.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matt 18:10-14, ESV)

These verses can refer to both literal children as well as disciples of Christ as both France (2007, p. 685) and Morris (1992, p. 464) point out, “The thought of disciples (not restricted to children, though of course including them) as ‘little ones’ continues.” “Here again it is uncertain whether the little ones are children or lowly disciples (his ‘common people’). Either makes good sense.” While holding a child Jesus makes the point that they are so important to God that like a shepherd He will search for them, rejoices when they are found, and does not want any of them to perish. France (2007) further summarizes these verses by saying, “The point is made explicitly in vv. 10 and 14 by emphasizing how much every single ‘little one’ matters to God, and therefore should matter also to fellow-disciples” (p. 685). Believers are shown that youth are so important

to God that He will search for the singular one who is missing despite the overwhelming majority being present. Christ has set the example for others to follow. France further explains this point when he says, “By likening the ‘little one’ to a wandering sheep reminds the disciples again of how vulnerable they all are. But it also reassures them that they have a ‘Father in heaven’ who cares for each one, and whose pastoral concern is meant to be shared by all his people” (p. 685).

The scriptures show that God makes room for youth in His cause. It also shows that it matters to God that youth are taught about Him (Prov 22:6). The Holy Book also teach that parents have a role in teaching young people (Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4). The scriptures show us that God calls people at a young age and also equips them for the task that He has for them (1 Sam 3:1-10; Jer 1:4-60). The scriptures also give evidence that God sets people in the life path of the youth He calls so that these individuals can have a positive influence on the youth He calls such as Paul’s mentorship of Timothy, which is seen in 1 and 2 Timothy. A Sports Initiative is one way to reach youth and young adults and to teach them about Him because they matter so much to God.

God Intends to Use Youth And Young Adults in a Special Way in the Last Days

It is important to keep youth and young adults connected to God and engaged in church because God has a special work for youth and young adults in the last days. The prophet Joel makes this clear when He says, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). Acts 2:17 which is a quotation of Joel 2:28 reiterates this point by saying, “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and

your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). These verses seem to reflect God’s intention to use young people in a special way in the last days. The “last days” is synonymous with the “end times.” One of the main tenants of Seventh-day Adventism is end-time prophecy. The texts in Acts and Joel show that both youth and young adults will carry out a good deal of ministry in the last days. A Sports Initiative serves to keep youth and young adults connected to God and engaged with the church.

While it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss in detail the specifics of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology, it can be argued that the true fulfillment of the prophecies of Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17 happened on the day of Pentecost which is spoken of in Acts chapter 2. However, could it be that God intends to do something similar in the eschaton? Adventist eschatology teaches that the people of Earth are now living in the last days. The next major prophecy to happen is the second return of Christ. The people of this planet are living in the last days and God is going to pour out His spirit on young men and women enabling them to prophecy and see visions. This means that now more than ever it is important for Christian believers to reach young people for God and keep them engaged with the church so that they can be fully used by Him to accomplish the special work He has for them.

Joel 2:12-14 lays the context for Joel 2:28-32. The context of Joel’s prophecy contains a call to repentance in hope of divine forgiveness. Ministry to youth is a lot of things. One of those things is a call to repentance. The bible is replete with calls to repentance, reforming one's life both corporately and individually. Complete youth ministry is to call both youth that are familiar with God and youth that have known Him

into a relationship with Him. It is also a call to youth that have fallen away back into a relationship with Him. Especially in these last days when it is clear that God intends to pour out His spirit upon all flesh and purposes to use youth in a special way.

Youth and Young Adults are Missing

While youth matter to God a great deal, studies document both a decreasing presence of youth and an absence of young adults in the church, which gives us cause for concern (Stetzer, Stiller, Christopherson, & Holland, 2014; Vogt, 2016). These trends suggest that greater thought and intentionality should be given to ministries that seek to reach out to these particular demographics. While there have been lots of ministry resources for youth developed over the years, there has been comparatively little available for young adults, although this has been improving over the past ten years or so. Yet, the scriptural mandate to love others as Jesus loved us remains despite the ministry resources that are available. The believer is to follow Christ's example in seeking people, building relationships, extending care, and ultimately leading them into a personal relationship with Christ.

More recently, research about how to reach youth and young adults not only shows that young adults are missing from churches in large numbers it also indicates that the Christian community's response has not been sufficient. D'Ambriso (2007) notes some of the reasons for this:

The absolute last thing that Millennials want is to be sat down in a classroom and 'taught' something. Look to the explosion of Co-working spaces, the growth of events like the Summit Series, and the massive uptick in craft brews & odd restaurants: to see that Millennials have taken a hard turn away from formal structures for fun, quirky, collaborative experiences. They care about culture and do not in any way want to be a part of some insulated Christian bubble. (D'Ambrosio, 2017, para. 3)

Not only are young adults missing from church, with each generation they tend to identify less and less as being people of a particular faith. Vogt (2016) points this out when he says, “Today’s young adults are 4x more likely to be ‘none’ than young adults in the previous generation” (para. 8). Church seldom crosses the mind of the person who classifies as “none” as Nieuwhof (2016) explains, “The average unchurched person doesn’t think about going to church any more than the average Christian thinks about going to synagogue. It just doesn’t cross their mind” (para. 2).

With the production of more books, articles, blogs, and vlogs in recent years it seems that the trend towards taking young adult ministry seriously is improving. In the last five to ten years, more churches seem to have started to make a concerted effort to minister to young adults. Before this, the tendency was for churches to elect a youth leader but not a young adult ministries leader. It is not clear whether the unique needs of young adults were overlooked or underestimated. One thing that is clear is that the lack of relevant and spiritually impactful ministry has likely contributed to the absence of young adults from the church in large numbers. The Barna Group (2011) addresses this by saying:

A second reason that young people depart church as young adults is that something is lacking in their experience of church. One-third said ‘church is boring’ (31%). One-quarter of these young adults said that ‘faith is not relevant to my career or interests’ (24%) or that ‘the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough’ (23%). Sadly, one-fifth of these young adults who attended a church as a teenager said that ‘God seems missing from my experience of church’ (20%). (para. 5)

This lack of young adults in the church has become so apparent that it cannot be ignored any longer, and more thought and energy needs to be given to ministering to, not only youth and young adults who are members of the local congregation or children of church members, but to those outside of the congregation as well. In fact, one might

argue that evangelism for youth and young adults is similarly inadequate and that the “built it and they will come” mentality still exists, rather than an approach that focuses on the unique needs of that community. Even in churches where programs have been established many youths and especially young adults still do not seem to be excited about the church and many continue to leave. According to Orme (2015):

While it’s great that there are better trained, more called, more specialized paid and volunteer youth leaders—the downside is that the gap between the overall congregation and the youth ministry is growing, which ends up being toxic to young people’s faith. As a result, students graduate and all they know is the youth ministry and the youth leader. They don’t know their church; they don’t know adults in their church. No wonder they drift away from the church because they feel like they’ve graduated out of it. (para. 4)

The Gospel commission implores Christian believers not to build, but to go, to move from their particular place of comfort, tradition, familiarity, and advantage and to reach out to others.

God Searches for Them

God searches for people who are lost. Not only does Matthew 18:10-4 show us that young people are important to God, it shows us that He will search for them. His care for them is the reason He searches for them. Believers are to follow suit. A similar theme of reaching the lost is found in the Great Commission of Matthew 28 which commands believers to go and to teach. This command to go and teach applies to reaching the demographics of youth and young adults as well. The Gospel commission is the impetus behind A Sports Initiative. A Sports Initiative is founded on the principle of going to the places where inner-city youth currently are. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20).

The typical Seventh-day Adventist church follows the officer nomination process that is outlined in the *Seventh-day Adventist church manual*. This leads most Seventh-day Adventist congregations to approach youth and young adult ministry in very similar ways. Generally speaking, this is a “build it and they will come” mentality. Build a youth ministry based on the church manual’s outlines and youth ministry will succeed.

Arguably this thinking has not produced the results one would expect. Typically, a youth leader is elected and tasked with building the church’s youth ministry. Often this expectation is placed on an individual who has little to no experience with youth other than the fact that they are relatively young. Typically, no training or learning resources are provided for them. Many times, a meager budget is voted and they are expected to do a stellar job building a consistent Adventist Youth (AY) program, strong Pathfinder ministry, and an exciting Youth-day Sabbath once a quarter or in some cases only once a year. The congregation then expects youth to come since these programs have been implemented. Unique ministries that effectively appeal to the distinctiveness of youth and young adults rarely receive support. A Sports Initiative is a ministry that seeks to heed the calling of the Great Commission of Matthew chapter twenty-eight by going and seeking out youth and young adults where they are.

The scriptures affirm God’s care for human beings and His desire to be in a relationship with them. God’s care is expressed as He extends help, pursues, and ultimately seeks to draw individuals into a saving relationship with Himself. This is true for all ages and stages of life; youth and young adults included. Additionally, scriptures

also affirm that God desires that His disciples care for others in the same manner that God cares for them. As Jesus is quoted as saying in John 15:12, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Christ stands as an example to His followers of how they should care for people in ways that include their physical well-being along with their personal relationship with God. The extent to which God was willing to go to express His love and care for us and to us, even in ways that seemed unconventional or unexpected, also invites us to reach out to others in similar ways as we seek to love others as God has loved us.

Scriptures show that God seeks to save everyone and that He does so in a variety of ways. God does not make gender, economic, ethnic, and other demographic delineations when it comes to salvation. He seeks merely to save everyone, which includes youth and young adults. Therefore, it is God’s desire that His followers follow His example and also attempt to reach everyone as well, including youth and young adults.

Throughout the Bible it can be seen that as God seeks to save He finds people where they are. God does not wait for individuals to seek Him out. Scripture suggests that one should not doubt that God will show Himself to those who do seek Him. Scripture suggests that God seeks man as if He understands that man may not seek Him. Scripture gives examples of God uniquely setting out on a path that will intersect with the life of those He is trying to save. In scripture, it is a given that God is interested in saving everyone. Following are a few biblical examples of God finding people where they are. God’s actions set the precedence for Christian believers to follow. Youth are disappearing from churches and Young adults are missing from many churches. As God

goes where people are to save them believers in Christ are to go where youth and young adults are in order to connect with them and lead them to God.

Early accounts in the book of Genesis show how Adam and Eve who were the first people on earth, were also the first on earth to need the saving grace of God. When they sinned (Gen 3:1-8) they did not go to God, confess, and seek mercy and grace. In fact, perhaps because they did not know what to do at all, we find them hiding and essentially doing nothing. God however did know and went looking for them. When they heard Him coming they hid, yet God still pursued them. Though the relationship between God and man had been damaged as a result of Adam and Eve's sin, it was God who went to them in the Garden of Eden. A Sports Initiative is one way in which youth and young adults who have strayed away from God through disobedience to His word can be reached in a similar way. These youth and young adults may also feel guilt and shame, hiding in their own ways, and may not know what to do. A Sports Initiative is one way in which God seeking them can be modeled.

The account of Exodus 3 shows us Moses busy tending to his herds when God showed up, in the form of a burning bush, with a special assignment for him and there in the middle of the wilderness, began to talk to him. Again, God was not waiting for Moses to seek Him out to see what it was that God wanted him to do with his life. God found Moses where Moses was and changed the course of Moses' life forever. There are youth and young adults busy with life much like Moses was, but God has a special calling for them. A Sports Initiative provides one of those ways in which they can come in contact with God to hear His calling.

In some cases, like the Ethiopian eunuch spoken of in Acts 8 who seemed to be one who was searching for God, we can observe this:

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. (Acts 8:26-28)

Though this individual was searching for God it is worth noting that it was actually God who found him and sent someone to him to help him in his discovery. Here again it can be seen that the action of God sending someone to where he was had a profound impact on him and his understanding -- so much so that the Ethiopian eunuch desired to be baptized as soon as he saw water.

There are youth and young adults in situations similar to the Ethiopian eunuch who are searching for God on their own but still have not yet come to a full understanding. They have a desire to worship him and they even read the Bible in order to gain a fuller understanding of God. As God sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch He sends people to those who are seeking Him but have not yet found Him. Once again in Acts 8 God is seen going to the person and meeting him in his context.

The Three Angles messages in Revelation 14 can be similarly seen as connected to the Great Commission in Matthew 28, and in Matthew 24 where Jesus talks about the signs of His coming and of the end of the age. This is particularly the case in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The Great Commission, to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded

you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20) also is of significance here, as this is the overall mission of every follower of God. Every believer is given the command to go forth and to teach and make disciples. When this is done in all the world, as Matthew 24 suggests, then the end will come. It would seem that the end will not come a moment sooner than the gospel being preached in all the world. Seventh-day Adventists have seen these passages as connected, that the three Angels message is how the Great Commission and the words of Matthew 24:14 will be fulfilled in the last days. The direct translation of the word “Angel” in Greek is “messenger” in English. Without going into an in-depth study of the Greek language and the construct of the Three Angles messages it can be said that believers living during the last days are the Angles or better yet messengers spoken of in Revelation 14:6-12. Revelation 14:6 says, “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev 4:6). Here it is seen that the messengers of the last days are to go to everyone who dwells on the earth. In order to reach every nation, tribe, language, and people in order to proclaim something to them the Christian believer must locate them and go to them. In order for the gospel to be preached to the entire world the believer must locate people and go to them. People will be found in varying situations and life contexts. The believer is still to go. It is not a stretch by any means to conclude that the believer is also to find people of various demographics. It would seem that the believer is to find youth and young adults and go to them in order to proclaim the good news of the gospel to them. Christian believers are to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to youth and young adults in their particular context and present Jesus in a relevant way. That is the job of the

messenger/believer who is alive in the last day. God calls the Christian believer to go and to proclaim to the world, not to wait for individuals to come to them. Once again, A Sports Initiative is a significant vehicle for ensuring that the gospel command to go to all people is actually able to be carried out.

Teach Youth About God

The Bible encourages parents to teach their children about God.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:5-9)

While these verses speak to teaching “children” they can also be applied to teaching youth and young adults because fully grown adults are to teach and model a godly life to young people of all ages.

It is important to recognize the distinctions in how each age demographic learn in response to the gospel. To reach youth and young adults the presentation of the gospel message must be uniquely tailored to them. According to Temple (2012):

The Bible doesn't envision that adolescents function apart from the inter-generational nature of the church. Believers, young and old, are all a part of the One Body of Christ and are necessary for its proper function (see 1 Corinthians 12). Yet, because of the cultural distinctiveness and legitimacy of adolescence as a unique time of life, a specialization of ministry to youth is in no way theologically forbidden. Consider a foreign mission analogy as an example: English speaking missionaries spend months – to years – getting to know foreign language and culture – so they can communicate the gospel in a way that foreign peoples will understand. They do not try to speak in English with people who don't understand English. Similarly, youth culture is very much a separate sub-set of culture. It makes good missional and pastoral sense (see 1 Corinthians 9) to recognize and minister to the specific spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and educational needs of adolescents. (para. 5)

Teaching youth and young adults does not need to be seen as an intimidating task. Often what is needed is much less the deep and ethereal articulation of concepts as simple straightforward truth – which is often more appealing to youth and young adults than complex theological concepts. Dyck (2011) makes this point by saying,

Young people are transformed by truth clearly presented. They're drawn to a cause to live and die for. In other words, they want the unvarnished gospel. When we present that gospel, with all its hard demands and radical implications, we'll be speaking the language they long to, and need to, hear. (p. 2)

Clear truth and straightforward answers are most effective in teaching youth about God. A Sports initiative is designed to be one of those contexts in which the Gospel can be shared in such a clear and relevant way.

The most helpful forms of teaching involve genuine personal interaction. While some teaching methods focus on presenting facts for students to memorize and reproduce when called upon, these often discourage independent and critical thought. Even memorization, when taken to the extreme, can focus so much on the individual self, that it can lead to a kind of self-sufficiency and a lack of dependence on the divine. White (1902) suggests personal interaction as a better method of teaching,

In all true teaching the personal element is essential. Christ in His teaching dealt with men individually. It was by personal contact and association that He trained the Twelve. It was in private, often to but one listener, that He gave His most precious instruction. (p. 231)

Again, a Sports Initiative provides such a context for personal interaction, and thus the possibility of maximizing the impact of teaching. It allows the pastor or spiritual counselor to be in the proximity with youth and young adults during the program, and also in those inevitable times when youth and young adults initiate personal conversations and may even request personal counseling. The attentive pastor as a spiritual guide will maximize these opportunities as they seek to teach and have a

spiritual impact on youth and young adults. As texts like Ecclesiastes 12:1 and 2 Timothy 3:14-15 suggest, spiritually impacting a young person builds a foundation for them to stand on when they are older. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Eccl 12:1).

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 3:14-15)

A Place in the Body of Christ

In 1 Corinthians 12 the Bible suggests that each believer has a specific place in the body of Christ depending on his/her spiritual gifts, and this applies to youth and young adults as well. First Corinthians 12 makes the point that no part of the body can survive by itself. Since young people are part of the body of Christ youth and young adult ministry cannot survive in isolation. So, for that reason Christian believers should not only seek out youth and young adults with the goal of introducing them to Jesus, engaging them with the church in totality should also be a goal. Connection to the church is vital because the church is the body of Christ. Josh McDowell teaches that the church is the change agent that Jesus left to the world and that if Christians wish to see youth ministry molded after Jesus Christ than those ministries must be rooted in the local church (McDowell, 2000).

DeVries (1994) continues to make the point that youth ministry should not happen outside of the totality of the church experience but should be an integral part of it,

Since teenagers are an integral part of the body of Christ, we need to understand this problem as a physician would. When an organ is removed from a living body, that organ dies, and sometimes the body dies along with it. The same principle is true in

the body of Christ. Whatever new models for youth ministry we develop must take seriously the fact that teenagers grow toward mature Christian adulthood as they are connected to the total body of Christ, not isolated from it. (p. 43)

Christian believers desire for our youth, young adults, and the entire body of Christ to thrive. Therefore, they should seek to draw youth and young adults to the body of Christ. Open Gym/A Sports initiative helps to meet this desire with a dual purpose. It serves as a first step in reaching youth and young adults in order to introduce them to Christ and His body, and it also serves as a way to keep them engaged with the body of Christ.

If youth and young adults are not integrated into the church, the body of Christ, then they will miss legitimate opportunities to understand their spiritual gifts and use them in the proper context of building up and edifying the church. The ultimate goal of this youth and young adult ministry is to reach youth and young adults who do not have a connection with a church nor a pastor, introduce them to Christ, connect them with a church and pastor, and initiate a lifelong commitment to Jesus Christ where they use their spiritual gifts to build up and edify the church and make disciples of other men and women. This is true engagement with the body of Christ.

Characteristics of a Church That Appeals to Young People

Reaching young adults in particular has less to do with special ministries, extraordinary strategies, and unique tactics and more to do with being passionate, authentic, and engaging in active outreach in order to impact the community. These are the primary characteristics of a church that wishes to appeal to young people. The only strategy that matters is being intentional about reaching young adults. “The first question for any congregation is, ‘Do we really care deeply about reaching young adults — so

much so that we will do what it takes for that to happen?” (Weems, 2016, para. 4). It would seem that congregations that seek to reach young adults must first consider their desire to do so.

Passion

Churches that appeal to young people are passionate about young people. The congregation wants them there and it shows. God’s passion for mankind is embodied in these words, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This text shows the world God’s level of love and desire for mankind. The love and passion of this text draws mankind to God. Churches that want to draw young people must first be passionate about them and second must show that passion.

True passion for young adults in particular compels congregations to develop an atmosphere in which young adults can thrive instead of spending time developing trendy strategies and tactics. “Many congregations say they want to reach younger people, but most are unwilling to change their worship or priorities to make it happen. Paradoxically, while many church members bemoan that the young lack interest in the church, they themselves show little interest in reaching emerging generations” (Weems, para. 4). This would mean that true passion for reaching young adults is demonstrated by transforming the church or entity into one in which young adults are welcomed, supported, nurtured and encouraged. This would suggest that any church or entity that talks about reaching young adults but is not willing to change for the sake of reaching the young adult demographic is inauthentic in their message.

In order for a congregation to change the individual mindset of the members and leaders must be willing to change first. No matter how conservative, traditional, or customary a church or entity is, change is possible. Research on brain plasticity shows that growth and development of new ideas can still be embraced. “Every day scientists are discovering the precise pathways by which changes in human consciousness produce changes in our brain and bodies. Our consciousness— this phenomenal gift from God to be able to think— activates our genes and changes our brain. Science shows that our thoughts, with their embedded feelings, turn sets of genes on and off in complex relationships. We take facts, experiences, and the events of life, and assign meaning to them with our thinking...Our thoughts produce words and behaviors, which in turn stimulate more thinking and choices that build more thoughts in an endless cycle” (Leaf, 2013, p. 33). Based on emerging research on the mind and its ability to change it is reasonable to believe that any congregation can change its mindset. These congregations can also develop a true passion for young adults. These congregations can transform themselves into places that are conducive to the welcoming, growth, nurture, and encouragement of young adults as well.

Authenticity

Authenticity is equally as important as passion. The biblical example is that authenticity should be our aim. “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5). Younger generations are quicker to sense authenticity or its lack thereof, and are quicker to call out inauthenticity than prior generations.

If we’re going to effectively reach Millennials, we have to move beyond gimmicks and tactics. It means we have to take a hard look at the very heart behind the unique

calling God has placed on us as leaders and churches...Millennials are searching for something from your church. It's not excellence. It's not coolness. It's not perfection. It's authenticity (Bowdle, 2016, para. 6).

There are three areas of authenticity that are important to young adults. These areas are authenticity about who you are, authenticity in proclaiming the gospel, and authenticity in living the gospel. Once again, A Sports Initiative is an ideal context in which to aid believers who seek to reach young adults, and to encourage them to be authentic in these three areas.

To be authentic is to be genuine and real. This can be summed up in the saying, "be true to yourself." Or, "be who you are." Young adults value authenticity in religious organizations. Churches that are more traditional and those that lean toward being more contemporary can both attract young adults. It would seem that being authentic and intentional is key. A church or other entity should be who and what it is. When a church tries to change who it appears to be in order to relate to young adults they can see that it is an act. Snodgrass (as cited in Liautaud, 2014, para. 6) offers, "Our generation has been advertised at our whole life, and even now on social media," he says. "Consequently, when a company isn't being authentic with their story we can easily see through this. If the church isn't giving you the whole story, if it's sugarcoated and they're trying to put on an act on stage, people in their 20s will see through this. This causes us to leave. We're good at seeing when people are lying to us" (Liautaud, 2014, para 6). A church, pastor, or other entity or person, seeking to reach young adults will find more success in being who and what he or she is so long as that person is intentional about reaching young adults. Millennials are not impressed with pastors who seek to be cool and hip. Nor are they impressed with churches who try to do programs for them. They value

authentic churches and people who are real about who they are and what they offer. The same article says, “Millennials are looking for authenticity. Unfortunately, a lot of churches today are striving to win over young adults by being relevant. Consider what Drew Dyck identifies as the potential point of connection: “Millennials have a dim view of church. They are highly skeptical of religion. Yet they are still thirsty for transcendence. But when we portray God as a cosmic buddy, we lose them” (as cited in Liautaud, 2014, para. 4).

Authenticity in living the gospel goes hand and hand with proclaiming the Gospel. The New Testament scriptures suggest that Jesus would rather set a person free from sin and physical maladies than condemn him/her. The NT also tells of a Jesus who took what was broken and restored it to wholeness. The same scriptures speak of Jesus inviting followers into a sacrificial life of discipleship. Young adults expect religious and spiritual organizations to exhibit these qualities. If the Gospel is proclaimed but these qualities are not on display the credibility of the organization is diminished and it is deemed to be inauthentic in the minds of young adults. Young adults are more likely to be drawn to a church that encourages people to make their community better than a church most interested in growing the attendance of its worship service. Community involvement is key.

Churches that grow young recognize the careful dance that values both fidelity to Scripture’s commands for holiness and knowing and graciously loving their neighbors. This dance affects how they serve, pursue social justice, help teenagers and emerging adults find their calling, interact with popular culture, and respond to heated cultural issues. Much more than developing detailed policies or releasing theological position papers, these churches train and infuse their young people with an integrated discipleship that enables them to thrive in our complex world. (Powell, Mulder, & Griffin, 2016, p. 237)

Active Outreach

It is clear that a church or entity that seeks to engage young adults must move beyond mere words and show it by their actions. James 2:17-18; 26 makes this point very well.

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Churches that are serious about reaching young people will provide ministry opportunities by actively engaging with the community. Young adults are drawn to churches and entities that embody the gospel. Young adults find greater fulfillment in making a difference than hearing about making a difference. They would rather be involved in the action than to simply support it from a far with financial support. Churches and entities that have ample ministry opportunities for young adults to participate in that make a tangible difference in the lives of other people will see a greater commitment and involvement of young adults in its worship service and other areas of service. Love of God and love of neighbor are truly inseparable for young adults.

“And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt 22:37-39). The idea of living the gospel is important to young adults and they seek churches and entities that live this idea. It is this type of social engagement speaks to the minds and hearts of young adults. Again, a Sports Initiative provides the church with an appealing ministry context for youth and young adults to engage with their community.

Summary

The Bible is clear that young people matter to God. They matter so much that He intends to use them in a special way in the last days. Unfortunately, youth are missing from the church, the body of Christ in alarming numbers. For this reason, God searches for them and commands believers to teach them of Him, of His love, and of His expectations for them. It is essential for young people to know about God because He has a special place for them in His body, the church. Churches that are serious about having a youth and young adult presence will have the characteristics of passion, authenticity, and active outreach.

Because of these biblical truths, A Sports Initiative exists to provide an important context in which to reach young people where they are, connect them to the body of Christ and teach them about God. It does this in an authentic way that speaks to the uniqueness of young people today.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Chapter

Using sports as a means to minister to youth and young adults necessitates an understanding of sports experienced in the context of life and religion. It also requires an understanding of youth and young adult ministry. This chapter will review current literature that pertains to youth and young adult ministry, as well as youth sports in religion.

The reviewed literature will give insight into the following areas:

1. Problems faced by youth and young adults living in urban areas.
2. The effect of family dynamics on the development of youth and young adults.
3. How youth and young adults view the church
4. Ministry that reaches youth and young adults
5. Examples of successful ministries centered in sport
6. The pitfalls of mixing religion with sports.

Problems Faced by Youth and Young Adults Living in Urban Areas

The desire to minister to youth and young adults in the urban context is mostly a response to the problems faced by youth and young adults residing in the urban setting. Most urban areas share many of the same problems. Those problems include, racial segregation, poverty, inferior education systems, high unemployment rates, substandard

living conditions, single parent homes, and minimal positive role models just to name a few (Massey & Denton, 2003). This section will discuss some of the problems that have become evident.

Divorce

Divorce is a problem that many urban youth and young adults face. Abigail Abrams (2016) notes that divorce rates have been on a decline in recent years but states that marriages still have a 50/50 chance at lasting. “Marriage rates had been declining for years in part because younger generations have waited longer to get married. But researchers have found that typical marriages still have about a 50% chance of lasting” (para. 4). Many young adults between the ages of 18 to 35 have grown up in divorced families. “Of all children born to married parents this year, fifty percent will experience the divorce of their parents before they reach their 18th birthday” (Fagan, 2000, para. 1).

We have learned that when children of divorce reach adulthood, compared to those who grew up in intact families they feel less religious on the whole and are less likely to be involved in the regular practice of a faith. In one national study, two-thirds of people from married parent families, compared to just over half of children of divorce, say they are very or fairly religious, and more than a third of people from married parent families currently attend religious services almost every week compared to just a quarter of people from divorced families. (Marcott, 2013, para. 2)

Lack of Church Participation

Studies show that it is unlikely for young adults today to study the Bible, pray, and attend worship services. It is common for these individuals to classify themselves as “more spiritual than religious.” Masci (2016) says,

While the U.S. public in general is becoming less religious, the nation’s youngest adults are by many measures much less religious than everyone else. Indeed, one of the most striking findings in the recently released Religious Landscape Study is that Millennials (young adults born between 1981 and 1996) are much less likely than older Americans to pray or attend church regularly or to consider religion an important part of their lives. (para. 1).

Warmold (2015) offers additional compelling data,

As older cohorts of adults (comprised mainly of self-identified Christians) pass away, they are being replaced by a new cohort of young adults who display far lower levels of attachment to organized religion than their parents' and grandparents' generations did when they were the same age.

The same dynamic helps explain the declines in traditional measures of religious belief and practice. Millennials – especially the youngest Millennials, who have entered adulthood since the first Landscape Study was conducted – are far less religious than their elders. For example, only 27% of Millennials say they attend religious services on a weekly basis, compared with 51% of adults in the Silent generation. Four-in-ten of the youngest Millennials say they pray every day, compared with six-in-ten Baby Boomers and two-thirds of members of the Silent generation. Only about half of Millennials say they believe in God with absolute certainty, compared with seven-in-ten Americans in the Silent and Baby Boom cohorts. And only about four-in-ten Millennials say religion is very important in their lives, compared with more than half in the older generational cohorts. (paras. 11-12)

The lack of church participation and lack of familiarity with religion and religious things lead one to assume that many young adults do not view the church as relevant or vital to their lives as previous generations. It can also be assumed that they lack knowledge of religious vernacular, customs, and traditions.

Secularism

The secularism of society has had an effect on the worldview of youth and young adults today. Generation X and the Millennial Generation have come up amidst the predominant message in society that it is “all about you.” This idea of self makes it harder to minister a gospel of selflessness to this group. One idea about increased secularism is espoused by Mary Rice Hasson who believes that this is mostly due to public schools, which do not include God in the subject matter. For six to eight hours a day students learn about the world, history, culture, science, and many other subjects apart from God's involvement in them. Students have deep discussions, and come to conclusions and make decisions in the academic environment without including God.

According to Hanson, this detachment from God has contributed to the increased secularism of youth and young adults.

Day in and day out, students learn about the world, science, history, and culture from the implicitly secularist perspective that God (if He exists) is irrelevant to enlightened discussions of human fulfillment, progress, culture, and meaning. Moral absolutes, such as the ones proposed by Christianity and the natural law, are shunted aside in favor of the secularist's preferred values of tolerance and equality. Students learn by doing, and the pattern learned by the students of yesterday has become the pattern of young adults today. As children, eight hours a day, five days a week, ten months of the year, for twelve years, America's now-young-adults built the habit of leaving God and His moral truths out of big conversations—and cultural celebrations. (Hasson, 2014, para. 8)

It can be argued that public schools are not the main culprit of increased secularism among young youth and young adults today. While prayer may have been a part of some school systems in former times discussions and teaching about God has never been part of the primary lesson plans of public schools in America.

Lack of Direction and Purpose

Young adults tend to have different problems than youth (Drummond, 2010). Worries related to college such as finishing on time, finding a job after graduation, moving frequently, transitioning from parental care to discovering who they are, and taking care of themselves are some of the general problems they face. Young adults seem to be very transient. Many have not yet laid down any roots anyplace. Many do not yet have gainful employment. Some have not yet committed to a lifelong vocation. They have not yet committed to a life partner and those who have are still learning how to exist as a committed couple and as a married couple. They either do not have children or they have small children. Childcare is a grave concern as they balance family time with work. This is a period of life characterized by complexity, confusion, and instability.

Drummond describes young adults as a group “in flux and not yet peacefully ensconced in a way of life” (Drummond, 2010, p. 13). Due to the fluid nature of their lives it is not surprising that many have not yet committed to a church.

Peterson (2011) adds this to the argument,

The term used in scholarly literature to describe this demographic—those between eighteen and twenty-nine—is ‘emerging adults.’ Perhaps as a sign of my own encroaching codgerdom, however, I was sometimes tempted to place a question mark after the ‘emerging’ or scare quotes around the ‘adult,’ as these young people appear to prolong the teenage years into adulthood by postponing careers, marriage, and family; avoiding most civic responsibility and political service; and aimlessly drifting in casual group relationships. (para. 4)

Growing Social Changes

Growing and transitioning from a child, to a teenager, to a young adult comes with a lot of change. As the mind develops and a person becomes more independent and self-aware the more a person makes decisions for themselves instead of following the prescribed beliefs and lifestyle of parents. Some believe that the inherent societal changes that a person encounters during this growth and transition contribute to a decrease in religious participation. Speaking mostly about Latter Day Saints youth Peterson (2011) goes on to say this, “Social changes over the past few decades such as an increasingly competitive world economy, an unstable job market, and the growing need for advanced educational training may explain much of this generational drifting” (para. 4.).

Patterson’s research is from a combination of sources broader than LDS authors and can have application to a broader scope of youth and young adults. Despite these societal changes that an individual encounter as one grows and transforms, it is not necessarily religious belief that lessons but religious participation. Smith and Snell (2009) note that,

in general, “These emerging adults are no less believing than previous generations but in practice have little use for organized religion” (p. 355).

Identity Complex

Another problem that young adults face is they are still learning about themselves. They are still discovering who they are, what they are passionate about, what they believe, and what they will stand for. Many young adults are wrestling with abstract ideas along with concrete ideas and are trying to figure out where the balance is between the two. And as they are wrestling with these ideas in the mists of discovering who they are, they often overlook themselves. They spend little time looking within. Instead, they look to other places and sources for answers.

As one grows from childhood to adulthood, tension is created as one is moving from being a dependent to being dependable. There are tensions between the young person and parents as this crucial time of life is navigated. It can be easy for religious faith to be overlooked during these times in a person’s life. Will religious faith flourish or will it fail, assuming that faith exists in the person’s life at all?

Modern Technological distractions

TV, phones, tablets, video games, internet, mp3 players, and social media platforms are just some of the modern technologies that seem to hold the attention of the youth of today. “Popular culture, focused on the youth market and championed by cable and satellite channels, the Internet and iPhones, further confuses the nature of adolescence” (Senter, 2010, p. 36). Modern technology has shifted how kids play. Kids go outside less and stay inside more playing with computers, tablets, video game consoles, and other similar devices. These modern technological devices have put

humans in constant contact with each other while at the same time reducing actual face-to-face and physical contact. An exaggerated life can be displayed on social media causing many youth and young adults to judge their own lives as inadequate compared to what they view from their peers. Ehmke (2018) says, “Experts worry that the social media and text messages that have become so integral to teenage life are promoting anxiety and lowering self-esteem” (para. 1). Modern technology provides many benefits and luxuries to life. Many technological advances have graduated from being benefits and luxuries to becoming necessities in modern life. However, many forms of modern technology can be a detriment to the self-esteem, psyche, and social skills of youth and young adults.

These are just some of the problems faced by youth and young adults who live in urban areas. The issues these individuals face are as varied, nuanced, and complex as the numerous urban centers and communities around the United States and the world.

The Effect of Family Dynamics on the Development of Youth and Young Adults

When ministering to urban young adults and youth who are growing and finding their way in life, it is highly likely that the majority of them who are ministered to will be from single-parent homes as mentioned in the last section. Evidence suggests that urban youth growing up in single-parent homes are most at risk (Ming, 2011). This is in many cases due to lack of parental supervision. Where family structure disintegration occurs, youth are at risk of their normal development being disrupted. Both young adults and youth are at risk of being impacted socially, financially, and psychologically. Other problems can also arise. This is often times displayed in negative ways. Problematic

behavior, withdrawal from other family members and/or friends can occur. Aggressive behavior has also been frequently seen amongst urban youth and young adults who grow up in single-parent homes.

Incarceration of a parent is an overlooked cause of single-parent homes in urban centers. According to Ming (2011), “The concentration of the incarceration trends seems to be in poor African-American communities. Incarceration has left higher numbers of children without parents, making the collateral damage greater” (p. ii).

The silver lining in single-parent homes is that other family members often step up to fill the void. It can be debated how healthy this is. Typically, the first person to step up to fill the void of a missing parent is a grand-parent. It is typical for a grandmother to become a surrogate parent when the main parent is either working, in school, or in need of personal time. Other family members to step up include older siblings, uncles, and aunts. There are many times where family friends step in as well. Recent studies show that despite the negatives of growing up in a single parent home a strong extended family structure outside of the home that includes other family, school ties, and church members is a tremendous benefit. A young person living in the midst of an urban-single-parent-home environment can grow up to be productive, well-balanced, socially and psychologically strong individuals when such influences exist in a young person’s life.

How Young Adults View Church

The number of young adults who see the church and other spiritual institutions as places that make a difference in society and a place to develop their leadership skills is dropping. It has become a constant theme in literature written about adults that sermons

of rebuke, theological debate, and ecclesiastical apology hold little weight amongst this group. When they do attend church they come hungry to learn and eager to be taught.

Young adults relate better to individuals than to institutions. It is becoming more evident that young adults who grow to have consistent spiritual influences in their lives are more likely to reexamine the meaning of success and to choose occupations and lifestyles that bring more satisfaction over that which results in a massive paycheck. It is also becoming more evident that many young adults would like to work in areas of their true passion and in ways that help others. The group of individuals born in the late 70s, 80s and early 90s are socially-conscious individuals who want to make a great impact on society, but they do not relate well to traditional institutional structures.

A decreasing number of young adults see the church as relevant. However, many would consider themselves spiritual and sense a need for connectedness to something greater. Many who do have a religious background do not see the church as relevant. However, they maintain a desire to live a life centered in high moral standards. Christian Smith gives insight into how young adults who do not see the church as relevant approach religion in their own lives. He says,

The de facto religion of this generation is ‘moralistic therapeutic deism’ (MTD). A sort of civic religion, MTD incorporates the beliefs that God exists, that it is important to be kind to each other, that our ultimate goal should be personal happiness, that God is seldom personally involved in individual lives, and that the good go to heaven when they die. (Smith, 2005, p. 154)

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’ (MTD) results, Smith and Snell (2009) believe, from emerging adults having largely absorbed the greater societal beliefs in individualism, multiculturalism, and relativism to the point that they see little difference

among various religious denominations and have little use for organized religion beyond teaching a basic code of conduct that, once learned, renders religious practice obsolete.

Ministry That Reaches Young Adults

It must be noted that as older generations, who tend to be more religious in the traditional sense, die off, the younger generation that is more “spiritual” than traditionally religious will become the dominant group in society. Popular society is becoming more religiously pluralistic and most of the mainstream denominations in North America are struggling to evangelize because of this.

To protect freedom of religion, our society is moving away from specific Christian references about Christmas, for example, to more general ideas that don't push Christ as the 'reason for the season'.... Christian evangelism no longer has the cultural support of general consensus and struggles to find a fit in our pluralistic society. (Adeney, 2010, p. 12)

Pronk (2001) writing about the church's task in a pluralistic society adds this,

Our society is pluralistic but not in the same sense as the New Testament world was pluralistic. The difference is that while pluralism in the ancient world was essentially religious, today's pluralism has to do with ethnic, racial, class and gender distinctions rather than religious differences. Modern pluralism does not concern itself with competing religious claims, but focuses on what it considers a much more basic distinction, namely the one between the secular and the sacred or religious dimensions of human existence. (para. 9)

Most denominations evangelize for church growth rather than people growth.

Traditional church phrases and approaches to many of life's problems seem simplistic to many young adults. Churches must be willing to take on the tough questions many young adults ask. “Contemporary young adults, especially those not from the church, recognize life's ambiguities. They live in a postmodern context that thrives on contradiction.

Simplistic answers from a trivialized God do not sit well in a post-September 11 world”

(Reed, 2002, para. 5). To attract young adults in today's pluralistic society it's better to

point out ways that God is at work in the general society, the impact He is having on individual lives, and how He is busy connecting us rather than to point out a list of religious do's and don'ts. Churches that are contemporary, culturally engaged, authentic, and care for the sick and hurting are better able to reach young adults in today's postmodern, pluralistic society (Stetzer et al., 2014).

Since young adults today are far less traditionally religious, ministry to this group must emphasize spiritual connectedness over religious adherence. It is better for a church to engage them in the activities of the church rather than convert them. Engage them in ministry, in conversation, life applicable bible study, in charitable works, in acts of selflessness, in a sense of community, and in relationships. These are things that are present in most healthy churches but they must be present for young adults if a church is going to grow and attract more young adults.

Young adults holding positions of leadership is one trend present in churches that are growing with young adults. These young adults, trained as either lay evangelist or professional ministers have been given the directive to seek out and establish relationships with other young adults. Sometimes the directive to establish relationships is primarily for church growth and other times it is to learn more about young adults and how they approach faith communities and how they engage in faith practices. In the end it all tends to lead to a church growing with people ages 18-35. McAllister while seeking to know what attracts these young adults to Christ found that they wanted God to be more real in their lives (McAllister & Springle, 1999). They wanted God to show them their life's purpose. They also wanted God to give them direction, clarity, and discernment regarding academics, career choices, and overall happiness. McAllister and Springle also

sought to know why young adults stay in the church. “Fifty-seven percent of the students said they stayed committed to their church and youth group because it helped them grow in their faith” (McAllister & Springle, 1999, p. 141). A church or ministry that emphasizes spiritual connectedness over religious adherence, helps young adults find life answers, and allows young adults to lead is a church that is in a better position to grow with young adults.

Most young adults today are very media savvy and able to consume large amounts of information rather quickly (White, 2014). Their minds work fast and are more mature at younger ages due to greater exposure to information. With quick mature minds, many can understand the biblical perspectives of the church. They appreciate honesty as to where a church stands biblically and find churches that water down their message or who try to cloak it so as not to turn people off as fakes. They appreciate the honesty of an organization’s beliefs but also appreciate the ability to dialog, ask questions, and even to doubt. They find churches that have defined visions welcoming when they see members trying to live out that vision in their personal lives and in the way they treat other, members, and guests. Pollack (2017) says this about today’s young adults, “Given the world Gen Zers grew up in and the world they face, they have the luxury of picking and choosing what they consume and can spot deception and inauthenticity from an extreme distance” (para. 12). Authenticity is the best policy when trying to reach young adults.

When ministering to youth and young adult males, one must do so with an understanding of their physical and psychological development in mind. As the male body goes through changes there are plenty of opportunities for socially awkward situations to occur. As a young man goes through puberty his body grows at an

accelerated pace and he often appears clumsy. As his voice is changing, it gives way to many unpredictable variations in his tone. He may not have facial hair while his peers can grow full beards, etc. These situations can cause a young man to have low self-esteem and a desire to avoid social interaction altogether. When ministering to young men this must be kept in mind as we seek to reach out to them, engage them in conversation, and ultimately establish relationships with them. These occurrences are their reality. We must deal with them on the level of their reality to reach them. A young man wants to be seen as just that, a man. He will defend his status as a man. He does not want to be seen as a boy nor associated with femininity. He wants to be viewed as all man. Parmach (2010) says it best,

Young adult men are strongly and culturally encouraged to act out in thought and deed in accordance with the concept and characteristics of erection. He is expected to socialize himself in public settings as a “manly man” in line with certain traits. As a man, he must aim high to be: hard, upright, unyielding, decisive, bold, assertive, unembarrassed, proud, pulsating, yearning, investigative, resilient, and responding powerfully. Any deviation from this list insinuates a palpable socio-cultural disapproval and perhaps even the need for re-evaluation of his manhood and masculinity. This is very evident for the college male today in his socially accepted conduct. (p. 642)

The thoughts of Parmach bring up an interesting point that must be taken into consideration when mixing sports with spirituality in an attempt to minister to youth and young adults. It is likely that the majority of the young people attracted to such a program will be male, especially if basketball is the primary sport of the program. While there are females who play basketball, the likelihood is that they will be in the minority. To maintain credibility amongst young men, those who minister to them must treat them respectfully as young men.

The demographic “A Sports Ministry” has the most contact with are black young adults. To effectively reach them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ one must take into account their community and social context. Serious attention should be given to showing the relevance of the Gospel to the experience of these particular youth. The Black church should know the community of Black youth very well. The church should know the hot social issues that are on the minds of the community. If the church knows the community and the community knows that the church knows the community, the community will be more willing to hear what the church has to say (McCray, 1986).

Examples of Successful Ministries Centered in Sport

Sports seem to instill a sense of pride in youth and young adults (Hunt, 2001). This is especially true of those who receive a good deal of support from adults. This is also particularly true of team sports. In general, youth united together for a single purpose seems to raise the level of esteem amongst each of the youth on the team, especially when guided by adults. Adult support is key.

Souls on Ice

Support from adults must be more than financial donations or offerings of prayer. In the article entitled *Souls on Ice: Black, Yellow, Red, and White*, a local pastor takes inner-city youth and introduces them to the game of Hockey. This pastor takes the young people beyond a mere introduction to the sport and engages them in full participation in a local hockey league that is usually dominated by whites. This full participation of the youth on the team is coupled with full support from adults from his church and other nearby churches. The support of the youth in this hockey league come in the form of

afterschool tutoring, driving players to camps and tournaments, emotional and spiritual nurturing, career mentoring, computer classes, incentives for academic excellence and community service. This program took place in Minneapolis Minnesota. It is a prime example of how a sports program can effectively put ministry professionals in contact with urban youth who may not regularly attend church. It is a prime example of how a sports program can be used to minister to urban youth in a variety of ways. This program in Minneapolis is also a supreme example of how sports coupled with spiritual disciplines can introduce urban youth to Jesus Christ and be the initial catalyst to these same youth establishing an everlasting relationship with Jesus Christ. Hunt (2001) has this to say,

Success stories far outweigh the failures. Several DinoMights have graduated and gone on to play for both private and public high schools in Minneapolis. Their testimonies reflect an appreciation for the opportunity to play hockey, but their greatest praise is for how the experience introduces them to Christ. (para. 13)

The following are testimonies directly from young people who participated in the program: “‘Now I could [not] care less what other people think of me and would pray in front of anyone,’ says high school sophomore Jordan Baynard, whose five seasons with the DinoMights helped ground him in his faith and instilled pride to play on a Christian team” (cited in Hunt, 2001, para. 14). Kayavin Unger, who now also plays on a high school team, adds that the DinoMights taught him “a lot of important things like responsibility, taking control of my actions, and being a leader. It has taught me more about God, and how to be a man” (cited in Hunt, 2001, para. 15).

These types of testimonies serve as evidence of the benefits of such sports programs. Programs that are mixed with spiritual disciplines and guided by spiritual leaders who are supported by other adults who have the best interest of the youth and young adults in mind. The article summed up the point this way:

Though a DinoMight might not participate in the Olympics or the NHL, every player will remember early-morning prayer huddles and the challenge to live a life honoring Christ, Foley says. Speaking at the team's annual fall banquet, one player summed up the DinoMights ministry: 'John and the DinoMights keep pushing us to stand up for what we believe in, act like Christians, and start praising God.' (Hunt, 2001, para. 20)

The article is very detailed as to how the program was implemented and as to what the objectives of the program were. It shows that such a program is possible on a small or large scale. This article is a great encouragement to those who seek to use sports as a means to reach youth and young adults for Jesus Christ.

YMCA/Invention of Basketball

The game of basketball's origins dates back to Dr. James Naismith famously nailing two peach baskets on opposite sides of a gymnasium. The first basketball league to ever exist was made up of YMCA teams who played each other (Beckford, 2011). Few people know that Dr. Naismith was an ordained Presbyterian minister who held a Theology degree from Presbyterian College in Montreal, Canada. Dr. Naismith was just a graduate student and faculty member at the YMCA training school which later became Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts when he created the game. Dr. Naismith was charged with inventing an indoor game that would give young men the opportunity to expend their natural energy and instinct to play (Mac, 2015). During the winter months, the young men of the College would grow restless from their unspent youthful energy when the weather would not allow for outdoor activities (Beckford, 2011).

The then-burgeoning Sunday school movement and the similarly growing YMCA movement were both closely allied. They were both led by large and denominationally diverse groups of pastors and church-based volunteers. The goal was to build character

and instill Christian virtue in young people. The game of basketball was created by James Naismith at the YMCA with the objective of ministering to young people.

Given its history, it seems very appropriate to use the game of basketball to minister to young people today. The entire YMCA movement, which engages youth in all types of sports, was centered around ministering to young people. Using sports to reach young people for the purpose of establishing or deepening their faith is a long and proven method. The success of the YMCA in its early days shows what can be accomplished through sports when mixed with religious virtues. If the program is sound, well thought out, and structured the sport can become more than a competition of strength and might, it can become an engaging lesson in the skills of life.

Mt. Zion Basketball Evangelism

The Mt. Zion Basketball Evangelism is another example of a successful ministry centered in sport. Mt. Zion church in Kissimmee Florida hosted a midnight basketball league for the community. The league was a partnership between the church and the Center for A Drug-Free initiative. Brice recounts the words of Maxwell Berkel pastor of the Mt. Zion church when he said of the ministry, “We believe that this is a great way to witness, seeing that it affords us an opportunity to share the values of a drug-free lifestyle with the community” (Brice, 2010, p. 39). Brice goes on to say, “In addition to providing a safe environment to play basketball, the program features an education segment that is designed to provide life skills, training, and aid in overcoming the negative pressures of the world today” (Brice, 2010, p. 39). James Lewis’ love for his church and passion for providing young men who are at risk with better opportunities prompted him to start a new basketball team. The team plays in the Allegheny West

Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Basketball League. James Lewis had to get special approval for the team to enter the league because the team is made up of both Seventh-day Adventist and Baptist youth. The Baptist youth are members of the Baptist church across the street from James' Adventist church. Stiles (2010) says,

Lewis felt the Holy Spirit convict him to share his blessings and to set a good example for the young men of his church. He noticed the 15-19-year-olds needed a healthy and safe outlet for their boundless energy, and stepped up to fill the void...Most of the boys come from challenged back-grounds and live in neighborhoods that draw them toward harmful activities and friendships. Lewis believes that basketball is such an engaging sport, and is so demanding and popular, that it can successfully counteract the negative influences. 'In our league, we take the best aspects of basketball, delete the negative aspects of the game, such as foul language, and replace them with Christ-centered language and view- points, and lots of prayer,' Lewis explains. (p. 24)

Brandon Cook

In the article "Basketball Co-Captain Witnesses to School" Dian Thurber tells the story of Brandon Dent, a Seventh-day Adventist who played basketball in a public school league after spending the majority of his education in Adventist-Schools. Brandon resisted the peer pressure from teammates to play in a game that took place during Sabbath hours. Brandon was not only an athlete, he also excelled in academics. Brandon's story is about playing sports and being a witness to others as he remained true to his spiritual beliefs that he received from home and in church. Thurber writes,

Dent is to be commended for taking a stand for the Sabbath. Though he missed the opportunity to play in several significant games for his school, he did not miss the greater opportunity to witness about the life of a committed Christian. (Thurber, 2004, p. 24)

The Pitfalls of Mixing Sport With Religion

There is a lot of good that comes when youth and young adults are involved in sports but what about the bad? It is important to point out that there are some potential pitfalls when using sports to reach people on a spiritual level. Hoffman (2010) says,

Sports have a huge cultural presence and affect the lives and livelihoods of millions. For this reason alone, they are a subject fit for Christian thinking. And as with most cultural phenomena, we can see in it the hand of God and the work of the Devil...Christian involvement has not always led to the betterment of sports, but often to the detriment of Christians. (p. 23)

Here Hoffman seems so to be referring to the negative attitudes toward an opponent, heightened aggression, and even tempers that can boil over and eventually lead to physical fights. One pitfall of sports is that the competition cannot only bring out the best but unfortunately the worst in anyone. This is a reality that must be taken into consideration when designing a program around sports that is supposed to teach and reach youth and young adults in a positive manner. The majority of the literature centered around sports mixed with religion speaks about the benefits while very little speaks about the same general pitfalls.

Pride and the desire for recognition are also enormous pitfalls to avoid. In 2001, there was a small Christian college in the south with an opportunity to win a national championship in the National Christian College Athletic Association in the sport of basketball. The star player received a failing grade that made him academically ineligible to play. The president of the school ordered the grade stricken from the player's transcript (Hoffman, 2003). The player went on to play, the school won the championship, but there was major fallout. As a result, there was lots of negative press, public protest, and firings which included the dismissal of the very president who ordered the failing grade stricken.

What made it worse is that it was a Christian College that promoted Christian virtues. The president was an ordained minister. The college's School of Divinity is named after him, and the failing grade came in a religion class. This incident is a reminder that certain sports objectives can bring out the worst in decision making from people who are considered to be the best.

Hoffman (2003) has this to say about the incident I mentioned above,

The act was not committed, as so often religious scandals are, as a way of lining the pockets of a charismatic leader to abet a profligate lifestyle, indulge a salacious urge, or to ensure a larger share of the television audience. In this case deceit grew out of something much more mundane and, on its face, more honorable: a simple desire to field a championship basketball team and thereby win a bit of recognition for a college. The disgrace was wrought, not by perverting something serious, but by perverting what some would consider among the most trivial of human pursuits: sports. That an esteemed man and a fine college would risk its reputation on the chance to secure success for sports may tell us less about human frailty in the spiritual arena than it tells us about the difficulty the Christian community has in understanding sport and appreciating its proper place in the life of believers. (p. 304)

This incident should provoke thought about what is important when mixing sports with religion to reach others or promote Christian values. Is the sport of utmost importance, or is the value of utmost importance? Where does one draw the line as far as ensuring that the sports part of the equation is successful? How does one avoid the pitfall of falling under the spell of "winning at all cost?" Can one "save face" when a mistake like that in the above story is made and chalk it up to another spiritual lesson learned through sport?

Hoffman (2003) asks this question:

Can sports be redeemed? If so, they would be wrong. Sports, at least since the Protestant Reformation, have been thoroughly secularized, valued by the church only for their instrumental value, but far too trivial to be of spiritual consequence. Whether this owes to some Reformational vestige of play-hating or is simply one of many signs of secularization is difficult to say. (p. 308)

Summary

A review of literature that pertains to youth and young adult ministry and a review of the literature that pertains to sports mixed with religion have pointed out many interesting things. One such thing is that the Christian church may need to have more discussion about sports mixed with religion. There is a plethora of evidence that supports the idea that a healthy marriage can exist. However, there are documented pitfalls. There is not enough information about how these pitfalls can be avoided. The evidence that supports the idea that of a healthy union between sports and religion can occur is replete with examples of how the union has worked in various sports with various religious groups. It was interesting to learn that the game of basketball was born out of a desire to use athletics as a means to groom young men in the virtues of Christianity. The majority of the content suggests that sports are important and should not be overlooked as mere trivial pursuits. The amount of good, the overwhelming evidence to positive outcomes in the lives of youth through sports cannot be underestimated or overstated.

The idea of ministering to youth and young adults can be a daunting task. Considering that the young adult generation is the missing, “black-hole” generation in many Christian churches it is no wonder this can be a daunting task. It is so because ministry professionals do not normally come in contact with them on a regular basis unless they deliberately seek them out. It cannot be overstated how important it is to be authentic when ministering to this age group. Once a church or ministry is labeled a phony it can be difficult to regain legitimacy in the eyes of busy young adults. A spiritual experience is valued over a religious experience. Connectedness to others is more important than connectedness to an institution. Living a life of purpose is valued over

living a life of wealth and excess. In order to successfully minister to young and young adults today there must be a paradigm shift in how church is done because traditional church just does not resonate with the majority of them.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AND NARRATIVE OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is universal and applies to everyone in all walks of life. A Sports Initiative is an effort to be true to the words of Colossians 1:28 by making the gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to youth and young adults, thereby increasing their church participation as well as their personal practice of the spiritual disciplines of devotion and prayer. “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). It is also expected that, by engaging them in these spiritual disciplines through sports, a relationship would be formed with a spiritual mentor, such as a pastor, who could then continue to be a positive influence in their lives. This chapter will give a description of how this process will take place.

First this chapter will briefly look at the problem of youth leaving the church. The relevance of this ministry will then be described. This chapter will then move on to explore the Spiritual initiative of this ministry. The latter part of this chapter will look at the recreation part of the ministry.

A Relevant Ministry for Missing Young People

It has been established that youth are leaving the church. By the time youth transition to young adults far too many have already left or are on their way out. Many

who do attend do not attend regularly or they feel out of place. The problem cannot be overlooked because it has been established that youth matter in God's cause. God has used many young people to carry out His purpose. He has also charged parents with the responsibility of teaching youth about Him and His will for each of us. Henderson (2001) gives three reasons why young people leave the church. They are,

1) not trained in the relevance of the biblical world-view to their lives. 2) Are not convinced that biblical faith is dependable in today's culture. 3) Are not shown by living examples from families and friends how much better the biblical world view is over others. (p. 7.)

McCray (1986), speaking specifically about black males, has his own beliefs of why youth leave the church.

It is common knowledge that the Black male is proportionately more absent from the Black Church than the Black female. Perhaps the Church was perceived more as a problem than a help to the struggles of Black people in America, in which struggles many young Black males were actively engaged. Consequently, successive generations of Black males have continued to emulate those who had nothing to do with the church. This has resulted in the manifestation of several generations of Black males having no Church background whatsoever. (p. 54)

A sports ministry is relevant for multiple reasons. One reason young people leave the church is that they are seeking for answers to life. But even though they may be missing from church, youth and young adults still have a yearning for spiritual things. This yearning is expressed in various ways, and reflects their desire to know why they exist and what their purpose is. John Cusick and Katherine Devries (2001) say the following regarding young adults yearning for spiritual things and to know life's meaning for themselves:

Secular and religious literature today reveals a good news/bad news scenario about which we need to be concerned. That literature indicates that there is a deep spiritual hunger expressed by many Americans. It is a hunger for meaning, definition, and direction in life. It is rooted in questions about what really matters. It reaches higher

than career goals, as important as those can be, to seek a purpose in one's life more fundamental than work or social status. (p.7)

Another example of how A Sports Ministry is relevant is in how it reaches a segment of youth and young adults that traditional church does not. As Henderson (2001) notes "The fact of the matter is that different people have different tastes in worship, and there is no church in existence that is going to be perfect for everyone" (p. 69). In recognition of this, A sports Ministry provides a type of church without being church in the more traditional sense. It appeals to youth and young adults who value aspects of what the church offers, but may not be drawn to more traditional expressions of church itself. A Sports Ministry is, however, an expression of what much of what most traditional churches represent, having a spiritual leader, fellowship with other like-minded individuals, spiritual disciplines, and encouragement to be the best version of oneself that a person can be. Because God is searching for lost individuals of all ages, including youth and young adults, this ministry provides another way in which they can be found by Him. Furthermore, because God intends to use youth in the last days, A Sports Ministry can be the way in which young people are brought in contact with God so that He can carry out His purpose through them as they respond to Him.

Because youth matter in God's cause, A Sports Ministry will also be a place of affirmation for young people. Not only will prayer, devotion, and Christian attitudes be stressed, but experiencing affirmation will also be central to the ministry. Youth respond to affirmation. Since youth is a period of finding oneself, a period of varying levels of self-esteem, self-doubt, and discovery, affirmation is a vital part of helping young people navigate this period of life.

People live for encouragement, and they die without it. Teenagers' emotional tanks are drained all day every day by the sarcasm, competition, and open ridicule of their 'friends.' They desperately need their parents to consistently express love and encouragement, especially when they don't deserve either one. (McAllister, 1999, pp. 157-158)

Finally, because A Sports Initiative intentionally prioritizes young people, it helps to ensure that their needs are more effectively addressed. Growing churches and ministries typically have a specific identity that is significantly shaped by specific demographic concerns. This suggests that churches or ministries are less likely to grow if they are trying to be all things to all people. They are less likely to reach their peak level of effectiveness if they do not their ministry to a specific group of people. Powell et al's. research highlights this point by showing that the difference between churches that grow and churches that grow old is priority. Churches that prioritize young people and their entire family make a concerted effort to allocate resources of all kinds along with energy and attention to the demographic they are trying to reach (Powell et al., 2016).

Spiritual Mentorship

Another one of the main objectives of A Sports Initiative is to teach youth about God through spiritual mentorship. In this respect, I as the director of the ministry, am the main spiritual mentor who seeks to teach youth about God. One expression of this is through the devotions and prayer that take place prior to the basketball games. Testimonies will also be a part of the ministry. Perhaps most significantly, youth will also be taught about God through the examples set by the director and other volunteers present to guide and oversee the games that are played. Through the general tone that is set for each night's programs that will emphasize Christian values of humility, selflessness, sharing and love, youth will also learn a lot about God and what it means to follow Him.

Christian Fellowship

A very important aspect of church is spiritual fellowship with other people who have similar beliefs and values. A Sports Initiative is essentially a way to make the most important aspects of church and spiritual life relevant to young people who do not regularly attend church or who do attend church but have not connected with a spiritual leader. A Sports Initiative will provide a setting for spiritual mentorship by being a place of Christian fellowship. Rodger Dudley, who led a 10-year study of why youth leave the church says this about church, “For our youth, it is an extended family, a nest of spiritual nourishment, a sense of hope, a mentor, an emotional support, and a center of true friendship and social interactions” (Dudley, 2000, p. 146). Dudley reports feedback from some of the youth who participated in the study:

One of the major themes shared by the youth in our study is that the most important things the church provides for them is Christian fellowship and true friendship. Many feel that church is just like an extended family in which everyone shares the same morals, values, and beliefs. They can get help and support from the church members when they need them. ‘They are always there when you are in need, just like God.’ Some of them feel it is a place to find real friends who can share common goals and interests. (Dudley, 2000, p. 147)

A Sports Initiative seeks to create a similar environment, expectation, and experience for the youth and young adults that participate in the ministry.

An equally important aspect of Christian fellowship is warmth. A warm caring environment is attractive and solves the problem of isolation because individuals are drawn out of their seclusion and into community with other people who are also drawn to the warm and caring environment. Powell reiterates this point:

As young people are choosing a church, warm community is often a stronger draw than belief. When we asked what keeps people involved in their church, the highest response was personal relationships (named by 1 out of 3), and warmth was almost equally mentioned. (Powell, 2016, p. 170)

While some people may be drawn to church and other ministries because of beliefs and may even stay because of them, many more are drawn to the church or the ministry and stay due to positive relational interactions. “For teenagers and emerging adults, depth of relationship opens the door to deeper exploration of belief. First relationship, then formation. First belonging, then belief” (Powell, 2016, p. 171). A Sports Initiative uses sports as its main draw but also follows this model of being welcoming and warm in order to draw young people in and to keep them. It will be an environment where young people can find community, connect with friends, find support, and experience trust. This warm and trusting environment will give spiritual mentors an opportunity to connect with those who participate in order to have a positive spiritual impact on their lives.

Devotion and Prayer

Because devotions are a staple of Christian disciplines, each believer is encouraged to spend time in devotion. This can take place a number of ways, through scripture reading, songs, sermons, prayer, etc., but the main objective is for the believer to receive a spiritual message which will help them focus on heavenly things. Krejcir explains the importance of devotion:

Devotions help us focus on Christ, who He is and what He did for us. Having a regular time to get in the Word will help us build perseverance. Scripture clearly tells us that real Christianity is more of a long-distance marathon than it is a short sprint. Thus, we have a call to keep on at the efforts and virtue of faith no matter what. (Krejcir, 2008, para. 3)

Keeping the needs and preferences of youth in mind, devotions will be simple and straightforward. The devotions before game play will present a good opportunity for the

spiritual leader to interface with the young person, as good teaching requires personal interaction.

Devotions will take place in two ways. The first is by assigning weekly readings of selected Bible passages that deal with the disciplines of reading and knowing the word of God and prayer. Readings will be assigned over a period of eight weeks, with two scriptures per week. One scripture will promote prayer, and the other the reading of the Bible. Participants will be asked to set aside a 20-minute devotional time at least once per week for reading the assigned scriptures. They will then be asked to spend a few minutes thinking about what they read, what the passages mean to them and how they believe they can be applied to their life. The weekly scriptural reading and personal devotions will take the place of the workbooks that were to be purchased for this same purpose. This change was made so that I could guide the focus of the devotions instead have having to follow a guide developed by someone else. See appendix B.

The weekly scriptures will be assigned as follows:

Week One

1. Bible Reading - Psalms 119:105 “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
2. Prayer - 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.”

Week Two:

1. Bible Reading - 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."
2. Prayer - 1 Tim 2:8, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

Week Three:

1. Bible Reading - 1 Timothy 4:13, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."
2. Prayer - Jeremiah 33:3, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

Week Four:

1. Bible Reading - 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."
2. Prayer - Isaiah 65:24, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Week Five:

1. Bible Reading - 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
2. Prayer – Psalm 5:3, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."

Week Six:

1. Bible Reading - Matthew 4:4, "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."
2. Prayer - Matt 6:9-13, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Week Seven:

1. Bible reading - Romans 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."
2. Prayer - 1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Week Eight:

1. Bible Reading - Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to

do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

2. Prayer - 1 Kings 8:28, “Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day.”

The second way devotions will take place is in a group setting before the activity of basketball begins. A Sports Ministry also known as Open Gym will begin with a devotion given by the director or another person who is respected by the young people in attendance. The devotional thoughts will be brief, scripture based, true to the text, and which have relevant applications to the situations the youth and young adult participants encounter in their daily lives. The devotion will always end with a short prayer, usually offered by the person giving the devotion, summarizing the application of the devotion. The prayer will also solicit God’s blessing over the sporting activity seeking safe, fair, fun, levelheaded, and injury- free play. Because these expectations can be lost sight of in the heat of competition, it is anticipated that the director may have to halt play when necessary to reiterate the expected conduct through another word of prayer. In this way, prayer will be one of the ways that Christ-like conduct can be brought back to mind.

Testimonies

Telling one’s testimony and hearing the testimony of others is key to building faith and learning about God. A testimony involves the sharing of a personal experience about what God has done. Two types of testimonies will be modeled: (a) Conversion testimonies which tell what life was like before coming to Christ, how one came to Christ, and what life has been like since then. (b) Recounting a recent time when one

recognized the presence of God in the midst of what was happening. “Across traditions and denominations, churches growing young frequently integrate testimony as part of their regular worship and spiritual formation” (Powell et al., 2016, p. 155). As more people share their stories, the more opportunity there is for others to see and believe that God is real and plays an integral part in human life. Everyone participating in the ministry will be encouraged to share both their conversion stories, and more recent testimony. While it is expected that there will be some initial reluctance, the more this is modeled by the director, assistants, and other willing participants, the comfort level for this kind of sharing should increase.

Participants in A Sports Ministry will also be encouraged to attend church and to keep a journal with basic notes about the worship service. Participants can attend any church they choose, and church attendance will be on the honor system. The director will ask participants to briefly discuss up to five questions about their church attendance in weekly devotional journals: (a) whether or not they went to church; (b) which church they attended; (c) what their thoughts were about the service; (d) whether or not they participated in any of the church activities outside of the worship service and; (f) what those activities were and what are their thoughts about those activities. If the participant did not go to church, the journal entry will be short, simply saying he or she did not attend church that week.

Location

The gym chosen for this initiative is the Lorenzo Paytee Pavilion at Los Angeles Adventist Academy, primarily because it is free to use for this purpose. It also provides a high school regulation-size basketball court with wooden floors, glass backboards, true

three-point lines, breakaway rims, a nearby water fountain and an indoor court that allows for the ministry to take place any time during the year. A high school regulation sized court is preferred because it is a full court with a size suitable for the common player who is not a Division-1 or professional level athlete. A well-maintained gym with good amenities may attract more participants. It may also attract higher caliber players. Higher caliber players prefer to play at the best facilities. Higher caliber players attract larger crowds.

The “street” name given to this initiative is Open Gym. This name was chosen because it is simple, and conveys a two-fold message to urban youth. The first, that basketball will be played on an indoor court, and that there is no charge for participating. No-cost basketball in a quality gym is almost nonexistent in the Los Angeles area. Most quality gyms, such as 24 Hour Fitness or LA Fitness, are pay-for-play. The gym chosen for the sports initiative is located close to the city of Compton and the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. According to the official city of Compton website there are thirteen parks in the city of Compton. Only six of those parks have outdoor basketball courts. Only two of them have gymnasiums with indoor basketball courts (Parks and Recreation, 2018). The park nearest the Lorenzo Paytee Pavilion at Los Angeles Academy is Magic Johnson Park, which is directly across the street. Its amenities do not include an outdoor basketball court or an indoor basketball court.

Advertising

Advertising the initiative to the target group will primarily be done through social media and word of mouth. Electronic flyers will be made to share via social media. A contact list of a few of the most influential youth and young adults in the target

demographic that A Sports Initiative is designed for will be developed first. Then, personal invitations through texts and emails informing them of the date, time, and location of the Open Gym will also be given to youth and young adults. Cusick and DeVries encourage intentionality when advertising and building a crowd:

A successful young adult group should not be left to chance or put in the hands of whoever shows up. Before the first meeting or activity, there is a lot of work to be done. When the people who fit the profile are invited and gather together, any young adult activity from the very beginning has a better chance of being successful. (Cusick & DeVries, 2001, p. 37)

Text, email, and social media are always a good place to start then trying to reach young people. It can be expected that the young people will spread the word without being instructed to do so because that is the nature of social media. Digital posters in the form of jpeg files will be made and posted on common social media sights. From there the information will spread via word of mouth through peer-to-peer contact. However, even with the aid of social and electronic media, personal invitations are still the best way to build a ministry of youth and young adults. Speaking specifically of Catholic youth and young adult ministries Cusick and DeVries list some invitation strategies that can be applied to all ministries aimed at reaching young people:

1. Keeping in mind the profile of who you want to participate, determine which young people who fit the profile are known personally by the organizers.
2. Develop a list of young adults from the parish census forms.
3. Collect past parish school and religious education program rosters.
4. Who do other people know?
5. Collect Names through parish bulletin announcements.
6. Solicit names and addresses of young adults from places where they frequent.

7. Have an ad or story written in the local community newspaper. (Cusick & DeVries, 2001, p. 38)

Several of these personal invitation strategies will be adapted and employed in building participants for this ministry.

The personal invitations, however are not only for building attendance at the ministry events, they also have a spiritual component as well, as they provide opportunities to help establish trust and open lines of communication between the young person and those who minister. The ultimate goal of the ministry is to use sports as a way to have a positive spiritual impact in the lives of the youth and young adults ministered to. It was through personal invitations that Jesus invited His disciples to join Him.

Matthew 4:18-19 records the call of Peter and Andrew:

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Transportation

No transportation will be officially provided by Open Gym. Participants are expected to find their own means of transportation. In conducting similar programs and ministries for this same demographic it was found that participants walked, rode bikes scooters and skateboards, carpooled with friends, took public transportation, some solicited rides from ministry leaders, and others had parents, grandparents and other family members drop them off and pick them up. It is expected that the same methods of transportation will be used for participants to travel to and from open gym.

Scoring

Most pickup games are played by scores of ones or ones and twos until the agreed upon winning score is met by either team. The agreed upon score is usually 10 or an odd number such as 11, 13, or 15. If the agreed upon score is 13, the game will be played until a team reaches 13, no matter how long it takes for that score to be reached. In an effort to speed up games so that more people have an opportunity to play, a portable scoreboard will be used to time games to eight minutes or the first team to ten points. This scoreboard will be operated by a volunteer or a person waiting for their turn to play. The typical two-point basket will count for only one point and the typical three-point basket will count for only two points. This is due to the simple fact that it is easier to count by ones and twos than by threes in the equation. This is typical of open gym style basketball. If the game is tied at the end of eight minutes, a one-minute overtime will ensue that will be played in its entirety. There will be no sudden death for the first overtime. Possession of the ball will be given to the winning team. The challenger will start on defense. If it is the first game of the night, possession of the ball will be given to the first team on the sign-up list. The second team will start on defense. In the event that the game is still tied at the end of the one-minute overtime, a second overtime will ensue.

To start this second overtime, possession of the ball will be given to the challenger or second team on the sign-up list, depending on what game it is. This overtime will be sudden death for the team with possession of the ball. If the team scores, it wins. If possession of the ball changes hands due to a turnover or rebound by the other team, that team wins and the team that started the overtime with possession of the basketball loses. This will keep the games from being too long so that more games can be

played during the two-hour period, ensuring that more people get to play and they that they get to play more games.

Team Organization

Running organized games of baseball will be essential to maintaining order in the gym, a spiritual atmosphere, ensuring that everyone have a chance to play, and that play is fair. At the start of each open gym, a sign-up list will be set out for individuals to sign up on a first- come-first-served basis. Usually in pickup basketball two captains are chosen who pick teams from the people present and ready to play. A person calls “next,” meaning they are the captain of the team that plays the winner of the current game. Depending on the number of people present, it is typical to have three or more people claiming “next,” which usually means the second person to call “next” has the game after the next game and the third person to call “next” is the captain of the team that plays the winner after the game that is after the next game and so forth.

One of the unique traits of Open Gym is that there will be no “next.” Instead the sign-up list will serve to determine who plays next. Full court basketball is usually played with 10 people on the court, five per team. Sign-up slots on the list will be grouped into sections of five and each slot will be filled by the next person to sign up. This will help ensure that everyone has an opportunity to play.

Rules

The game rules will be general “pickup ball” rules for basketball, which reflect most of the regular basketball rules. The biggest difference is that there is usually no shot clock or referees in pick-up basketball, so there is no rush to shoot the ball in a certain amount of time, and everyone calls their own fouls. However, backcourt will also be

added, since the games will be played on a high school regulation-size basketball court, which has plenty of room for the enforcement of this rule. Backcourt is usually not enforced in pickup games because most pickup games are played in parks or gyms with smaller size courts that do not have enough room for this rule to be practical. Enforcing this rule will add a bit of suspense to the games because it gives the team playing defense another option to trap or cause a mistake or turnover by the team on offense.

A battery-powered megaphone will be used by the director or another person in charge in order to communicate to everyone one in the gym.

Rules Enforcement

The expected conduct during Open Gym will be what is generally considered Christian conduct. This is conducting oneself with restraint and friendliness. Curse words, fighting, and gang activity will all be heavily discouraged during Open Gym. The fact that the activity will take place on the campus of a Christian school will be stressed. The idea that a place being more sacred than most others may be a factor in helping individuals maintain the desired type of behavior. To reduce the chance of a physical altercation, a certain expectation of conduct will need to be set, communicated and enforced. The rules of conduct will be communicated before the devotionals at the start of the weekly activity. It will also be communicated during the activity as necessary.

Enforcement of the desired behavior will take place in three different ways. The first is by the director or another respected person overseeing the activity the rules reminding individuals of the rules and expectations. The second way the rules and expectations will be enforced is through the expectations of peers and other players. It is expected that the majority of those in attendance will want to enjoy a trouble-free

experience. Due to this desire, the expectation will be communicated from one participant to another. Peer-to-peer expectations carry much weight amongst young people. In certain settings, if multiple peers communicate to another peer that he/she is the problem, it is likely to be enough for the overly aggressive participant to calm down and stop being a distraction and nuisance. Studies prove the power of positive peer pressure, “What our study suggests is that teenagers learn more quickly and more effectively when their peers are present than when they're on their own” (Paul, 2015). Katzenbach and Khan (2015) contribute to this point:

Peer to peer interactions may be the single most neglected lever of change. When enlisted, they are change’s most powerful ally; when resisted, they are its most stubborn foe. Peers in large organizations are invaluable in spreading behavior change across an enterprise. In that respect, they constitute a woefully underused set of resources, mostly accessible within the “informal elements” of our organizations. Whenever significant numbers of peers interact formally or informally, they constitute a force to be reckoned with. When they share mutual respect, they will listen to, learn from, and secretly support one another in ways that can shape opinions, create resistance, or generate energy. (para. 2).

The third way the desired rules and conduct will be enforced is by expelling the disruptive individual from the activity. If the individual respects those in charge of the event, they may leave without incident or simply fall in line with the conduct expectations.

Summary

A Sports Initiative is a ministry that seeks to be relevant in postmodern times. It is designed to reach youth and young adults that do not have a relationship with a pastor or do not regularly attend church. The goal is to reach young people through sport in order to form a relationship that leads to spiritual mentoring. The primary sport is basketball, which will be played on an indoor court. The game of basketball attracts the targeted

demographic which is youth and young adults in the urban context. Gameplay and the overall tone of the ministry is respect for God and for each other. It is expected that the components of spiritual mentorship, i.e. Christian fellowship, devotion, prayer, and testimonies will have a positive impact on the lives of the young people who participate in A Sports Initiative.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

This chapter will present the outcomes of the project. It will first give descriptions of the methods of research, the participant group, and the facilities that were used in the project. The outcomes discussed will be church attendance, devotions, spiritual mentorship, peer-to-peer accountability, parental interaction, and participant volunteers.

Research Methodology

In order to establish a relationship of spiritual rapport with youth and young adults of Los Angeles who may not attend church or engage with a pastor or other person of spiritual influence a weekly basketball open run with a godly overtone, overseen by a pastor was established. The youth and young adults who attended the open run are referred to as Participants. Participants were engaged in weekly devotions, prayer, and scripture reading. Participants were encouraged to attend Sabbath worship services, and or to attend more regularly. Participants were tasked with journaling about their experience in said worship services. While A Sports Initiative is the name of the project, Open Gym is the name it is known by in the community and amongst participants. The project lasted a period of eight weeks.

In church growth terms Open Gym would fall in the Incarnational model as opposed to the Attractional model. The Attractional model seeks to make church a place where individuals who are not a part of that church would desire to come. The

Incarnational model is centered around taking church to where life happens. Mancini gives insight into the Incarnational model which can be applied to the concept of Open Gym:

Attractional means that the church's basic strategy for reaching the lost revolves around getting 'seekers' or the 'unchurched' into the church building. In contrast, the incarnation emphasis of the missional mindset focuses on living and sharing the gospel where life happens. (Mancini, 2008, p. 34)

Open Gym is an effort to take the spiritual tenants of faith, fellowship, bible study, prayer, etc., to a place where life happens for youth and young adults, the basketball court. It is expected that by using the sport of basketball to engage youth and young adults in these spiritual disciplines that a relationship would be formed with a spiritual mentor such as a pastor. It is then hoped that this spiritual mentor would continue to be a positive influence in their lives. This chapter will give a description of how this process took place.

Research Participation Sample

Participants in open gym were youth and young adults from local Seventh-day Adventist churches, students from Los Angeles Adventist Academy, and other youth and young adults from local community who had no affiliation with a Seventh-day Adventist church or school but may have a Seventh-day Adventist friend. There were 45 regular participants. There was almost a 50/50 split of Adventist to non-Adventist participants with twenty-three participants claiming to be Adventist. Both males and females participated. Thirty-seven males, eight females.

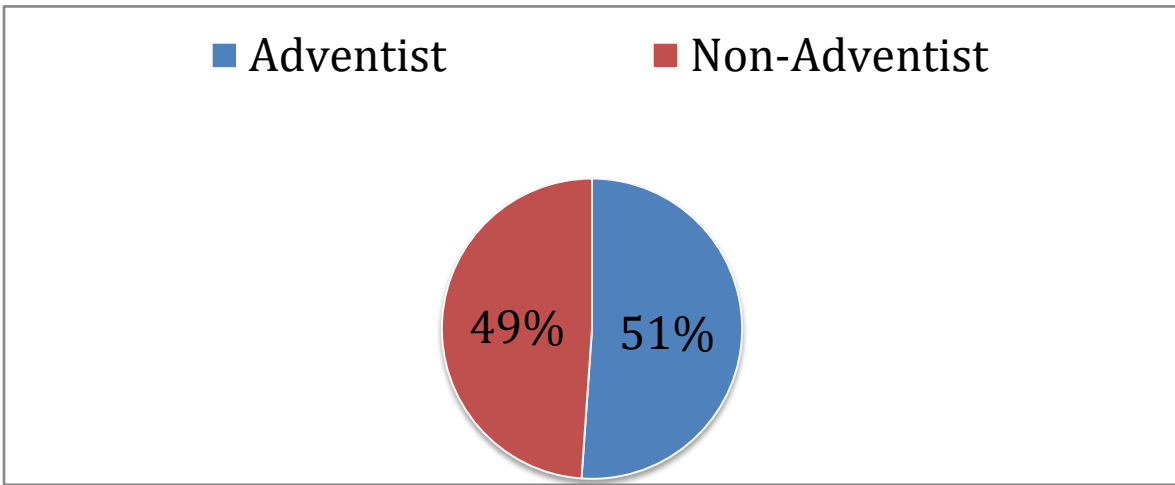


Figure 1. Adventist to non-Adventist participant ratio.

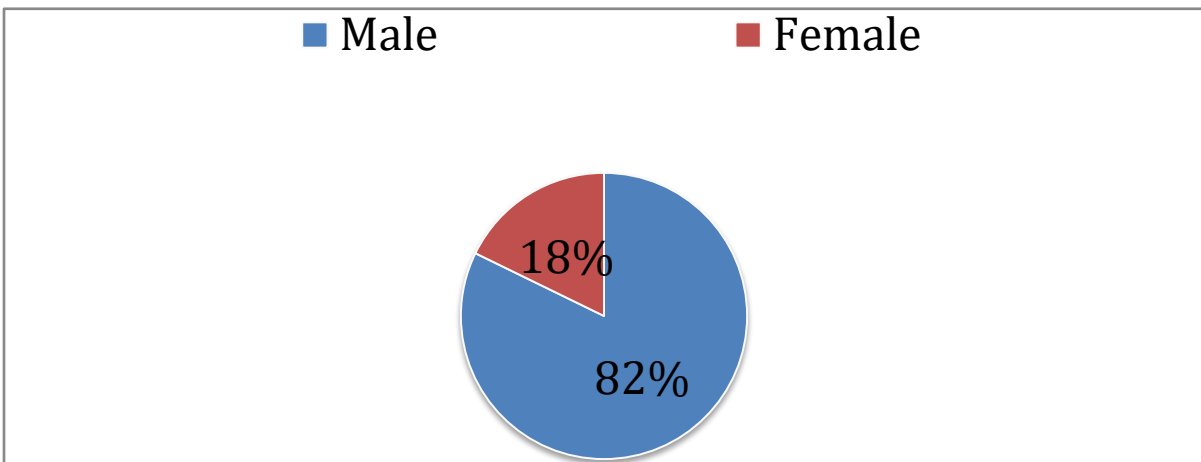


Figure 2. Male to female participant ratio.

Participants were residences of the Los Angeles County cities of Carson, Compton, Downey, Gardena, Lakewood, Long Beach, and Los Angeles. According to 2010 United States Census data there are 9,818,616 people in Los Angeles county. Nine percent (9%) are Black/African American and 48.6% are Hispanic or Latino. Open Gym participants were almost exclusively African American. Of the 45 regular participants two were bi-racial Black/Latino. The other 43 were black consisting of African-American and Caribbean heritage. The median age of Los Angeles County is 36.3. Open Gym participant ages ranged from 15 to 25. According to 2000 census numbers, there are over 1,700 Christian churches in Los Angeles County. Adventist participants were primarily from the Southern California Seventh-day Adventist churches of Berean, Breath of Life, Compton Community, Normandie, Tamarind, and University.

Facility Usage

A Sports Initiative was dependent on a gym or park with a decent basketball court. The gym at Los Angeles Adventist Academy, the local Seventh-day Adventist school, was chosen primarily because of its central location to the target group of youth and young adults. It was also chosen because of its familiarity amongst the youth and young adults of the local Seventh-day Adventist churches and surrounding community.

A meeting was scheduled with the school principle and business manager. A Sports Initiative was shared with them during this meeting. The objectives and anticipated outcomes were also shared. Overall A Sports Initiative was presented as a ministry that would benefit the youth and young adults of the local churches and community at large including those who attend and work at the academy. Weekly dates and times were agreed upon and the usage of the gym was approved.

The bulk of the program was scheduled to take place in the summer when school was out of session. However, it did overlap with the fall semester of the school term. The overlap was not an issue because the program was scheduled to start later in the evening well after school hours. Thursdays from 7pm to 9pm is the time agreed upon during the summer when school was out of session. Thursdays from 7:30pm to 9:30pm is the time agreed upon during the fall semester. The half-hour difference was to accommodate for the school's scheduled basketball team practices and games.

Due to the program taking place after school hours the custodian was given special instructions. The custodian is usually the last one to leave the school grounds after completing his tasks. He is usually the one to ensure that everything is locked up and the school is secure. Since Open Gym concluded well after he completed his tasks he was instructed to allow the program to continue so long as I was there on site. He ensured everything else was locked away and I was given the responsibility of securing the gym and the main gate to the campus once the program concluded each Thursday evening. A lot of trust was placed in me. I am sure it was due to the fact that I am a local pastor with good rapport with the school principal and business manager.

Outcomes

In this section I will discuss the outcomes of this project. I will share what was experienced and discovered in the following areas: Church attendance, devotions, spiritual mentorship, peer to peer accountability, parental interaction, and participant volunteers.

Church Attendance

One of the objectives of Open Gym was to gauge whether or not it would have an impact on church attendance amongst the youth and young adults who regularly attended Open Gym. Although Open Gym is an attempt to take church to where life happens for youth and young adults, there is still a desire to connect them to the greater body of believers. It is hoped that the Open Gym participants would experience what Dudley reported other youth and young adults found in church:

One of the major themes shared by the young in our study is that the important thing the church provides for them is Christian fellowship and true friendship. Many feel that church is just like an extended family in which everyone shares the same morals, values, and beliefs. Some of them feel it is a place to find real friends who can share common goals and interests. Others told us: ‘An outlet to express how God blesses my life with good and healthy fellowship. (Dudley, 2000, p. 147)

As stated in Chapter 4 church attendance would be on the honor system and not counted by means of signing in/out or other markers of attendance. Through conversations with the youth and young adults and observations within the church, a positive response to the spiritual emphasis of Open Gym was shown, but a significant increase in church attendance amongst the majority of the young people was not shown. However, consistencies in church attendance amongst those who previously attended church on a regular basis was seen.

Young men and women who already attended church on a regular basis continued to exhibit consistent church attendance. Consistent church attendance is defined as attending a Sabbath worship service a minimum of three times per month in a four Sabbath month. I noted three occasions in which two of the non-Adventist Open Gym attendees were present in my church, when they were visiting with a few of the Adventist youth who were also Open Gym participants. Two non-Adventist participants reported

two other occasions when they attended one of the other local Adventist churches. They too were visiting with the friends who first invited them to Open Gym. So out of the 22 non-Adventist participants four were seen in a Sabbath worship service or reported attending a Sabbath worship service five times in the eight-week period of the project. That these young men who were first invited to open Gym came out and participated in both the spiritual and athletic aspects of Open Gym and then visited the church of the friends who initially invited them to Open Gym, and that they visited the church on more than one occasion was a positive result.

Table 1

Non-Adventist Participant Church Attendance

Non-Adventist Participants	Total Who Attended a Worship Service	Total Number of Times Non-Adventist's Attended a Worship Service
22	4	10

As the Youth and Young Adult Ministries Coordinator for my Region within the Southern California Conference I was able to visit other local churches, either to attend a service or program they sponsored, or because I was sponsoring a program from my office of Youth Coordinator. While visiting these other local Adventist churches I noticed that the Open Gym attendees who were members of other local Adventist churches continued to be consistent in their attendance at their home churches. During my visits to

other local Adventist churches I did not notice any of the Open Gym attendees from the community who had no previous affiliation with any of the local Adventist churches. The only time I witnessed youth with no previous Adventist affiliation is what I mentioned above, when two young men came to my church as guests of their friends who originally invited them to Open Gym. It appears that the peer to peer invite was the determining factor in the two young men's presence in church. "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb 10:24 ESV).

Following the weekly devotions, I would encourage the attendees to visit my church, at least partially because I wanted them to see me function in that environment, as pastor, in a church, dressed in a suit, speaking from the pulpit. Ideally our prior relationship would help dispel any apprehension of approaching pastors. I cannot say for certain whether this happened for the few who did visit my church.

I would also encourage participants to find a regular church home and a pastor who they could trust and form a relationship with. For the majority of the attendees, from my observation, this did not appear to happen. Because the majority of them reported that they grew up in church and had memories of attending church as a kid with their parents or grandparents, church attendance was not a new concept to any of them. However, the majority of attendees of Open Gym were not very interested in attending church on a regular basis. It was only those who were already consistent in church attendance who kept to this practice.

Church attendance journaling was to be part of the project. There were five questions that the participants were to give their thoughts about in their devotional journals. Those five questions were: (a) Whether or not they went to church? (b) Which

church they attended? (c) What their thoughts were of the service? (d) Whether or not they participated in any of the church activities outside of the worship service? (e) What those activities were and what are their thoughts about those activities? From my observation, it appears that the participants who attended church did not follow through with the written journaling assignment. However, I was able to verbally ask the questions.

As I already reported, most did not go to church. For those who did, though, their thoughts on the service were positive. The most positive comments were in regard to the music, followed by good remarks about the sermon heard during their visit to church. Most of the negative remarks had to do with the length of the service being too long, and were from some who described the service as dry and boring. Unfriendly people, long sermons, too many strict rules and judgmental attitudes were also among the negative elements of feedback about the church services.

The negative responses are right in line with the research of Dudley, in his book *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, where many of the same reasons are noted as he compiled responses and testimonies from young people:

Members act like they love the Lord when in reality they don't. People react to others and try to portray themselves as what they are not. They taught us one way and in so many cases did not abide by their own teaching. People do not live the love they preach and the doctrines they so adamantly cherish and to which they incessantly claim to cling. Another common theme shared by the youth is that the rigid standards and rules which involve dress, jewelry, and entertainment, etc., tend to obscure the core of Christianity—a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Too much emphasis on rules and not enough on loving each other. Some people are so caught up with the rules, they forget to have a relationship with Jesus. (Dudley, 2000, pp. 174-175)

Devotions

Each night's program started with devotion, followed by prayer and a rundown of the rules. The devotional outline listed in Chapter four of this dissertation was not followed completely. Room was given for adjustments and improvisation. Most of the adjustments happened in order to touch on current events. Devotions were tailored to speak to local or national current events. This helped make the devotions relevant and more interesting.

There was an average of 45 individuals present each night of Open Gym, about two thirds of them arrived on time. Because the devotions were near the top of the order of the nightly activities, those who consistently arrived on time would hear the devotions and participate in the prayers. However, everyone present, despite their time of arrival, benefitted from the positive spiritual influence set by this initial part of the program, and maintained through the entire program where Christian behavior was stressed through all of each night's activities. These combined attempts at sharing a spiritual message with those in attendance did not fall on deaf ears. Each person who attended was very receptive to the devotionals and prayers.

While, like church attendance, participants were on the honor system in terms of reporting their participation, when asked, affirmed that they were engaging in the weekly scriptural readings and prayer. They also reported a deeper appreciation for the bible at the end of the eight weeks, and an appreciation for an organized plan of scripture reading and prayer. A few participants said they normally do not read the bible and pray consistently because they do not normally have such a guide. The guide was a significant contributor to making it easier for them to achieve a level of consistency during the eight

weeks. It was also reported that the weekly readings and prayer emphasis reinforced the message of Open Gym during the days of the week participants were away from Open Gym.

Spiritual Mentorship

The majority of the attendees did develop a healthy spiritual trust. In a sense, I became their pastor. This was one of the main goals and anticipated outcomes of this project. Despite their lackluster church attendance young adults still have a common degree of spirituality. It is this degree of spirituality that I wanted to appeal to through this project.

The project did increase contact between myself and the Open Gym attendees who already attended my church or other local Adventist churches and events. While the youth and young adults may have known I was the pastor and I knew them to be members, we did not have much contact due to the size and activity of the church. Open Gym became a place of commonality for us that put us in closer proximity. This closer proximity allowed us to establish a relationship that still remains strong. I came to know the personalities of the regular attendees as they got to know mine.

I noticed a degree of self-introspection amongst some participants due to the rules, standards, and subsequent peer enforcement as these players came to me and shared their feelings about wanting to do better and be better in various areas of their lives. Participants mentioned desires to be more selfless, kinder, more punctual, more dependable, caring, helpful, and to be better leaders. Participants also expressed desires to pray more, study the bible, and to be more spiritual overall. Some desired to better themselves by enrolling in college or trade school programs.

Each and every Thursday night of the program someone approached me to ask that I keep a particular situation in prayer. Sometimes it was a job I was asked to pray for. Sometimes it was a situation with school. Other times it was a relationship with a parent or girlfriend. I was also asked to pray for a friend who the person asking was concerned about. In many ways, I could see that I was becoming a spiritual guide and pastor to the participants.

Harvey Cozart, developed a spiritual mentoring program at the University of Eastern Kentucky among African American males who disproportionately were having difficulty with academic and social integration at the university. It was found that this mentoring program had similar effects on its participants that Open Gym had on its participants. Cozart (2016) reports:

As a result of my research, I discovered four major findings. First, subjects seem to thrive when connected with a group of their African American peers within the positive mentoring environment generated through Collegiate, Black and Christian. Second, subjects began to grow in their confidence as a leader when given opportunities to lead. They also grew in their ability to lead. Third, subjects began to make positive life decisions and grew spiritually when engaged in learning scripture and taking spiritual retreats that focused on growing in their faith. Lastly, subjects began to develop a greater desire to excel academically even before college, through the pressure of family or a desire to leave the negative environments in their hometowns. (para. 3)

Peer-to-Peer Accountability

My conversations with each of the regular attendees revealed that they all found the overall Spiritual atmosphere of Open Gym beneficial. Most were respectful of the rules of conduct. There were frequent occasions where I did not have to enforce the rules of conduct because the attendees would do it amongst themselves. If someone said a forbidden word out of frustration or simply lost their cool altogether during the

competitive gameplay their peers would check them and remind them of the rules and expectations regarding conduct, no matter who the people were that were involved.

While there were a few participants who would complain more than the others, I am not sure if they were purposefully giving me a hard time, or actually were really bothered by some of the rules and standards that were put in place. While these individuals would argue or claim that the rules were inconsistent from week to week, the majority of those who attended regularly defended the consistency of the rules. This type of accountability from teammates and peers worked to encourage the ideal behavior much more effectively among the participants than a facilitator lecturing about it would have. Realizing that other participants bought into the rules and standards of open gym positively impacted new participants and participants who had not yet fully bought in. Research shows that there is such a thing as positive peer pressure, and it seems that this came into play, bringing non-compliant participants into compliance with the rules and standards of Open Gym. The power of positive peer pressure is one of the most intriguing things gleaned from this project. Online youth ministry training and parental resources give insight into the positive aspects of peer pressure:

Teenagers tend to follow the crowd. If they are caught in the act of smoking or drinking they cite peer pressure as the main influence behind their actions.

According to research, if properly harnessed, the same pressure can motivate individuals to stay focused and work hard towards achieving their goals. Positive effects of peer pressure on teenagers are also evident by the example of a student who is motivated to get good grades because his friends are getting good grades – an action that can be attributed to positive peer pressure. (“How Positive Peer Pressure Works,” 2013, para. 3)

Peer pressure isn't just about teenagers encouraging each other to take risks or engage in unhealthy behavior. There are also many positive ways peer pressure can be a good force in the life of your teenager and their friends. Positive peer pressure is when

someone's peers influence them to do something positive or growth building. For example, peers who are committed to doing well in school or at sport can influence others to be more goal orientated. Similarly, peers who are kind, loyal or supportive influence others to be the same. Advice from a peer is often more influential to a teenager than advice from an adult because they can impact the choices friends make more than any adult can sometimes. (Encourage Positive Peer Pressure, paras. 1-2)

Facilitators had fewer issues week by week as participants held each other accountable for displaying the desired behavior by enforcing the rules and standards amongst each other. Positive peer pressure may be most effective within a team. Grenny, while speaking of teams in the work place gives insight into the team dynamic that can be applied to sports, relationships, and any venture where people work together:

We have found that teams break down in performance roughly as follows:

In the weakest teams, there is no accountability
In mediocre teams, bosses are the source of accountability
In high performance teams, peers manage the vast majority of performance problems with one another. (Grenny, 2014, para. 7)

Parental Interaction

The level of contact that occurred between myself and the parents of some of the regular attendees was not anticipated. Parents of the regular attendees who were members of my church began to talk to me on a more consistent basis. On one occasion a parent visited the Open Gym program because he heard many positive things about it from his sons. While visiting, this dad video recorded the devotion and much of the gameplay so that he could capture the overall feel of the program and share it with other parents.

Parents had a deep appreciation for Open Gym because of the positive effects it was having on their own youth. They recounted to me the positive conversations they had with their children about Open Gym, and those parents I saw on a regular basis would encourage me regularly and express their appreciation. Because these parents knew

where their young adult children were on Thursday nights, it made them feel good that their sons and daughters were in a positive place receiving spiritual guidance, and it was a place where they wanted to be.

In addition to numerous verbal affirmations from parents I also received text messages and Facebook messages from parents affirming their support and appreciation of Open Gym. The news was spread by word of mouth from parent to parent. There were also two parents who attended Open Gym with their teenage sons. These fathers participated in the games and received the same recreation and spiritual messages as the rest of the regular attendees. The sons of one of the parents continued to come on a regular basis and even brought friends on several occasions. In these instances, Open Gym became a good place for fathers and sons who shared basketball as a common interest to spend time together.

Participant Volunteers

Another thing I did not anticipate is that individuals would come forward desiring to assist in various capacities. There is one young man who approached me and asked if he could conduct some of the devotions. We worked out a few dates and he came prepared and delivered a solid word to his peers who were regular attendees. On occasion, he would help out and conduct the affairs of Open Gym. He would enforce the rules and conducted the nightly affairs of the basketball games. On one occasion I was running terribly late and he took the lead in conducting that night's devotion and saw that everything got started. In this instance, Open Gym became a training ground for equipping youth and young adults for leadership and ministry.

Each night we used a scoreboard to keep track of the time and score of each game. At the start of the project either I would run the scoreboard or I would have to solicit individuals who were not playing in a game at that time to run the scoreboard. Open Gym became not only a place for youth and young adults to play basketball but also a place where youth and young adults could hang out. One young lady who would only come to hang out decided to take it upon herself to run the clock. From the first time she decided to do so she came on time every Thursday night, setup the electronic scoreboard and managed it for each game all throughout the night. I never asked or suggested that she do such but I greatly appreciated her help. I did thank and affirm her for her initiative. After a few weeks she started to bring a friend with her every Thursday to sit at the scorer's table along with her to keep her company. Both these young ladies came consistently, on time, and stayed till the end. Their service and initiative was a priceless help. They were present during all of the devotions and enjoyed the spiritual tone of Open Gym. In this instance, Open Gym was a place of volunteer service for these young ladies.

I ended up with a main assistant in much the same manor. An adult, in great shape, who loves to play basketball attended Open Gym on a regular basis. He is a member at my church and has a great rapport with many of the youth and young adults from the local Adventist community who are regular attendees of Open Gym. Though I never asked this gentleman to become my main assistant that is exactly what happened. He attended consistently, started everything if I was running late or if he arrived earlier than I. He also stayed later and helped clean up and close down. Like the young ladies who took the initiative to run the scoreboard his help in taking the initiative to assist

where needed was greatly appreciated. Open Gym became of place of volunteer service for him as well.

Summary

The prevailing sentiment regarding the devotions, spiritual emphasis, and overall Christian atmosphere of Open Gym is that it was enjoyable and beneficial. Overall the rules, standards, spiritual atmosphere and subsequent enforcement of the rules of Open Gym served to positively impact the participants. The main objective of using sports to interact with youth and young adults in order to become their spiritual mentor was successful.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will summarize the project as well as list recommendations for improvement of its implementation at Normandie Avenue church. These recommendations are suggested for any group desiring to implement this ministry.

Summary

The Sport Initiative intervention developed for youth and young adults of the Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church (NASDAC) was launched August 2015 and concluded September 2015. The report of this intervention consisted of the following:

The ministry context was shared and the problem of the youth and young adult demographic being largely absent from church and lacking a relationship with a pastor or other spiritual mentor was highlighted.

A theological foundation was given on the biblical basis for ministry directed at addressing the decreasing presence of youth and young adults in church and their lack of a relationship with a pastor or other spiritual mentor. This reflection revealed that young people matter in God's cause. Because Youth and young adults have a place in the body of Christ, God intends to use youth and young adults in a special way in the last days. Youth and young adults are missing from church. God searches for missing youth and young adults. Finally, it takes passion and authenticity to reach youth and young adults.

A review of literature was presented that dealt with: (a) Problems youth and young adults living in urban areas face. (b) The effect of family and church influences on the development of youth and young adults. (c) How young adults see the church. (d) Ministry that reaches young adults. (e) Sports and the benefits to youth and young adults.

A description of the methodology, development, and narrative of project implementation was given. This included the development of A Sports Initiative as well as the implementation of the project.

Finally, a report of the outcome of this project was shared revealing the impact of the project including: (a) Impact on church attendance. (b) Impact of devotions and scripture reading. (c) Spiritual mentorship. (d) Peer to Peer accountability. (e) Parental interaction. (f) Inspiration of participant volunteers.

Recommendations

Using sports as a means to gain access to youth and young adults in order to form a relationship of spiritual mentorship with them and encourage greater church attendance and involvement has been a learning experience. Having completed this process, I believe the Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church and other churches with similar issues can benefit from this approach of connecting with youth and young adults. During the process, several challenges were revealed regarding NASDAC and other area Seventh-day Adventist church's approach to ministry to youth and young adults. Several ideas for change in area wide youth and young adult ministry were discovered. Opportunities for further outreach to youth and young adults were noticed. There are also areas where the project could be improved for greater impact. Here I will share some of those recommendations.

Implementation at Normandie Seventh-day Adventist Church

1. Secure pastoral leadership and engagement. In order for this project to be successful pastoral engagement is crucial. The pastor must have a passion for youth and young adults. With the pastor as the driving force behind the project other church members will get excited and support the effort.
2. Develop the project. This entails both the spiritual, physical, and organizational aspects as well as the desired outcomes.
3. Secure a facility for the project. The location of the gymnasium needed for this project is crucial. It must be easily assessable for youth and young adults in the community. It is best if there is no cost for young people to enter and participate. A clean modern gymnasium with glass backboards, break-away rims, and a wooden basketball court with all the standard lines and markings is best for this program. The project must be shared with the school, park, or recreation center where the project is to be held so that the controlling individuals have a sense of the ministry aspect. That way they buy in to the ministry and help support it in various ways.
4. Advertise the project. This can be done using all forms of modern media. However, the best advertisement is word of mouth among the desired demographic. Young people will come, especially young men.

Devotions and Prayer

1. Develop a structured devotional plan centered around a central theme that last six to eight weeks.

2. Devotions through the spoken word are to be done at the beginning of each week's activities.
3. Weekly scripture readings and time of prayer and reflection are to be assigned to the participants.
4. Give participants opportunities to lead devotion.

Church Attendance

1. Invite participants to attend a weekly worship service.
2. Encourage participants who are regular church attendees to invite their peers to visit a worship service with them.
3. Develop a simple guide for participants to journal about their experience visiting a worship service

Spiritual Mentoring

1. Take advantage of the proximity granted through the design of the project to interact with the youth and young adults on a more personal level.
2. Develop rapport with young people by being genuinely concerned about them.
3. Gain trust through transparency and authenticity.
4. Listen to them. Remember their names, stories, and concerns.
5. Model maturity and spirituality.

Game Play

1. Develop Rules of participation and communicate them effectively and often.
2. Communicate disciplinary actions and enforce them fairly.

This ministry can be duplicated by other churches and non-profit youth organizations.

Other entities can build on the foundation set by Open Gym. This can be done by expanding the type of sports played. Other entities can also build on the foundation by adding or substituting objectives i.e. financial literacy, sexual health awareness, academic learning etc. in addition to or in place of spiritual mentorship. Churches and other ministry focused organizations can also partner with sports programs that are already in existence. A partnership may prove successful and have greater benefits as each organization brings a strong, focused, and proven program to the partnership.

Project Improvement

1. Implement strategies aimed at boosting church attendance such as:
 - a. Offer rides and other transportation assistance.
 - b. Personally invite participants
 - c. Develop plan for participants who regularly attend church to invite and encourage other participants to visit church.
2. Share the theological foundation of Open Gym with other area churches and encourage them to recruit participants to volunteer to help facilitate the project
3. Use a more contemporary Bible version for the weekly devotions and scripture readings.
4. Encourage journaling by developing an actual journal for participant usage during the project. Review journals on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.
5. Increase the length of the project. Given time more of the participants who were initially reluctant to trust the facilitators can become comfortable and developed a relationship in order to be spiritually mentored. More time can help to strengthen the relationships that were developed in the original length of the project.

6. Implement a comprehensive follow up plan that includes but is not limited in gaging participants' spiritual growth and continued mentoring.

Conclusion

This project was successful in meeting most of the objectives I set out to accomplish. Sports proved to be a great platform to gain proximity to youth and young adults. The commonality of sports broke down age barriers and the awkwardness of different generations relating to each other. The resulting proximity and openness allowed me to form relationships with many of the young people resulting in me becoming a spiritual mentor in their lives. As a spiritual mentor participants sought me out for prayer and counseling regarding varying situations in their lives. My relationship with many of them still remains.

The project was successful in immersing the participants in a godly environment that was not church but equally as spiritual. Open Gym was a way to take church to those who do not come to church or who do not participate in church instead of expecting them to actually come to church. Participants engaged in many practices that take place in the traditional church setting, such as: (a) Hearing the spoken word. (b) Bible study. (c) Prayer. (d) Fellowship. (e) Spiritual counseling. As a result, behavior was positively affected during the weekly activities and possibly beyond.

The project was not successful in significantly increasing church attendance and participation amongst the participants who were not regular church attendees. Even though a few participants did visit a few worship services, overall very little interest in attending a church worship service was shown amongst participants despite

encouragement from me as the facilitator. Those who did attend did so at the personal invitation of their peers.

Volunteers emerged from amongst the participants and helped to facilitate the tasks of running Open Gym on a weekly basis. Participants volunteered in the following ways: (a) Clock operation and score keeping during game play. (b) Offering devotional thoughts. (c) Helping to set up, breakdown, and clean up. (d) Directing activities in my absence. Open gym became a place of volunteer service. This was an unexpected result. It was very appreciated because it enhanced the consistency and quality of Open Gym and over all helped to make the project a success.

Peer-to-Peer accountability was one of the most essential lessons learned from the project. Peers influenced each other to: (a) Follow the rules. (b) Respect the facilitators (c) Take the spiritual aspects of Open Gym seriously.

Other churches and ministries can easily replicate this project. It has proven successful in putting dedicated, spiritual minded adults in proximity with youth and young adults in order to form relationships with them and to be a spiritual mentor. This program can thrive in urban, suburban, and rural settings alike because the core principle of using something of interest to youth and young adults as a medium remains the same. If the sport of basketball is not popular in a particular area find a sport that is. It can be soccer, tennis, swimming, etc. The core principle can even extend to a drama club, music/band, debate team, etc. As long as local youth and young adults are interested, there are willing and capable mentors, and there is a facility that can house the ministry the basics of this project can be replicated.

Replicating this project will strengthen relationships with young people the adult already knows. Replicating this project will also introduce adults to young people from the community. This project functions as both an in-reach ministry and a community outreach ministry. Youth and young adults were glad to attend. They gave high praise of the ministry. Their lives were positively impacted, which is in itself an indication of the project's success in meeting its objectives.

APPENDIX A

PROJECT ABSTRACT

August 2015

Project Title

Ministering to Youth and Young Adults Through A Sports Initiative In The Normandie
Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church

Researcher

Michael Jenkins Jr., Pastor, Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist

Project Dates

August 2015 – September 2015

The Problem

1. The Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist church is centrally located among other nearby Seventh-day Adventist churches in south Los Angeles, California
2. The presence of youth and young adults in worship services and ministry participation has diminished at Normandie.
3. Youth and young adults who do attend church do not have a strong relationship with the pastor or other spiritual figures.
4. A 2008 study shows the median age of Adventist congregations is 51 while U.S. census data shows the median age of the Westmont neighborhood of south Los Angeles where Normandie is located is 25.
5. Normandie's youth and young adult situation is a microcosm of the other area Seventh-day Adventist churches.

The Task

1. The task of this project is to use sports as a vehicle to bring youth and young adults into proximity of a pastor or other spiritual leader.
2. The pastor or spiritual leader will develop a healthy relationship with the young people and act as a spiritual mentor
3. Sports will draw both youth and young adults who attend church and those who do not
4. Basketball will be the main sport. Games will be played one night per week for a period of eight weeks.

5. The atmosphere will be spiritual. Devotions and prayer will take place.

Participants will be encouraged to attend church worship services and journal about their experiences.

Justification of the Project

1. To provide a model for outreach, evangelism, and overall ministry to youth and young adults.
2. To ensure that Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church is providing relevant and effective ministry to the community where it is located.
3. To obey the biblical mandate of the Great Commission set forth in Matthew 28:19-20 to share the gospel with everyone.

Expectations of the Project

1. Forming of relationships between youth/young adults and the pastor or spiritual mentor
2. Spiritual mentorship of pastor or spiritual mentor to young person.
3. Youth and young adult's increased practice of the spiritual disciplines of devotion, bible study, and prayer.
4. Increase of church attendance of youth and young adult presence and participation in worship services and ministries.

Who Can Participate

1. Ages 15-30 is the primary demographic target of the project.

2. Both male and female are welcome

APPENDIX B

A SPORTS INITIATIVE WEEKLY BIBLE READING AND PRAYER PLAN

Week One

3. Bible Reading - Psalms 119:105 “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
4. Prayer - 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.”

Week Two:

3. Bible Reading - 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”
4. Prayer - 1 Tim 2:8, “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

Week Three:

3. Bible Reading - 1 Timothy 4:13, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”
4. Prayer - Jeremiah 33:3, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

Week Four:

3. Bible Reading - 1 Peter 2:2, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”
4. Prayer - Isaiah 65:24, “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

Week Five:

3. Bible Reading - 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
4. Prayer – Psalm 5:3, “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.”

Week Six:

3. Bible Reading - Matthew 4:4, “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”
4. Prayer - Matt 6:9-13, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us

our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Week Seven:

3. Bible reading - Romans 15:4, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”
4. Prayer - 1 John 5:14-15, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” James 5:16, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

Week Eight:

3. Bible Reading - Joshua 1:8, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”
4. Prayer - 1 Kings 8:28, “Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day.”

APPENDIX C

OPEN GYM TEAM SIGN UP SHEET

Date: _____

Team 1

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Team 4

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Team 2

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Team 5

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Team 3

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Team 6

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

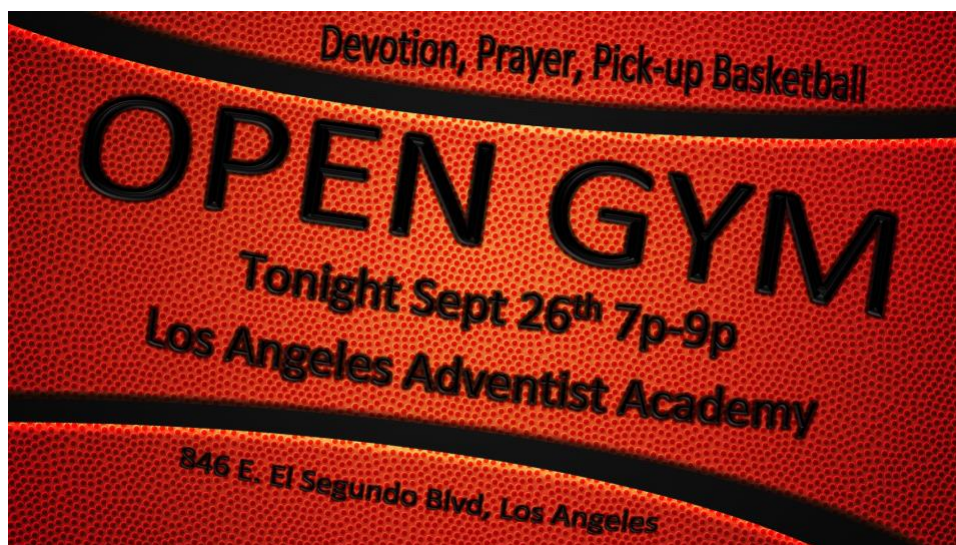
APPENDIX D

Worship Service Journal Questions

1. Did you attend a worship service this week? Y / N
2. What church or religious service did you visit?
3. What are your thoughts about the worship service?
4. Did you participate in any activities other than the worship service?
(Meal, ministry, concert, field trip, etc.)
5. If so what were those activities and what are your thoughts about your experience?

APPENDIX E

Flyer Samples



APPENDIX F

Project Expenses

- 54.99 - Basketball (Wilson Evolution)
- \$6.99 - Paper for signup list
- \$2.39 – Ink pens
- \$2.49 – Clipboard

Total - \$66.86 + Tax

Other Items needed provided at no additional cost to the project

- Gymnasium with full basketball Court - There was no cost for gym usage.
Organizations that wish to duplicate this ministry may incur cost for usage of basketball court.
- Megaphone or PA system – A megaphone was already owned so there was no additional cost to the project.

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2011-2017 GLAR Youth and Youth Adult Ministries Coordinator (Part-time)

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2003-2004 District Pastor, Watts and Carson Seventh-day Adventist Churches

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2010-2016 GLAR of SCC Convocation Committee

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