

**Factors Affecting Young People Participation in Small Christian
Communities: Insights from Interview Data Collected from Five Small
Christian Communities at Virgin Mary Mother of our Savior Parish, Kipawa
Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania**

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Abstract

The research examines the factors affecting youth participation in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kipawa Parish, Tanzania despite having a youthful population. There has been a decline in their engagement with SCCs. The study uses structured questionnaires to gather insights from participants in five specific SCCs. The findings reveal that there is a significant gap between the perceived importance of SCCs for nurturing faith and the actual involvement of youth within these community structures. Various barriers hindering youth participation are identified, including time constraints, lack of passion for religious activities, and misaligned priorities. The study recommends multifaceted strategies to address these challenges, such as strengthening the role of families in fostering spiritual growth and creating specialized Youth SCCs within existing structures.

The research advocates for efforts that emphasize the holistic importance of SCCs for all age groups, emphasizing unity, shared experiences, and spiritual growth. It highlights the potential impact of external factors such as technological influences and the surrounding environment on youth engagement in SCCs, urging an integrated approach to pastoral initiatives. The study concludes that addressing the observed decline in youth participation requires a strategic amalgamation of pastoral efforts that foster family-centric spiritual practices, tailor SCCs structures to accommodate youth preferences, and implement targeted awareness campaigns to instill a renewed appreciation for the intrinsic value of SCCs among the youth demographic.

In summary, this research identifies barriers hindering youth participation in SCCs in Kipawa Parish, Tanzania. It recommends multifaceted strategies such as strengthening family-centric spiritual practices and creating specialized Young People SCCs within existing structures to

address these challenges. The study emphasizes the holistic importance of SCCs for all age groups and highlights external factors that impact youth engagement in SCCs. It concludes that addressing the observed decline in youth participation requires a strategic amalgamation of pastoral efforts that foster family-centric spiritual practices tailored to accommodate youth preferences while implementing targeted awareness campaigns to instill renewed appreciation for the intrinsic value of SCCs among young people.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

[Small Christian Communities](#) play a vital role in nurturing faith and fostering spiritual growth among believers. Today there are over 195,000 Small Christian Communities in the nine Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) countries in Eastern Africa. But there is a gap. Five countries (Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia) have extensive statistics. For example, Tanzania alone has over 65,000 SCCs and Kenya alone has over 50,000 SCCs, this marks a good achievement of the SCCs Idea since it was established, for instance in the Dar es Salaam Archdiocese in January 2007 it had 49 parishes. As of 31 December 2011, Dar es Salaam Archdiocese had 3,040 SCCs in its 67 parishes. As of 31 August 2018, Dar es Salaam Archdiocese had 5,555 SCCs in its 111 parishes (based on approximately 50 SCCs each in the 111 parishes). (AMECEA, 2019)

The number is higher if you include SCCs in schools. According to a censer conducted in 2022, Tanzania has one of the world's fastest-growing young people population. Of the estimated 60 million people in Tanzania, more than 50% are under 18 and over 70% are under 30. Adolescents from over 12 million of the overall population of 60 million; according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (UNICEF, 2021)

Catholic Church Renewal International (CCRI) recognizes the significant role of young people the online platform created by CCRI is one of the ways we are responding to the needs of young people by offering them a safe place to share their concerns and find support for the life issues they face (Vatican, 2007). This research proposal aims to investigate the factors influencing the status of youth to attend Small Christian Communities, Tanzania the number of young people and Roman Catholic believers among them is larger than the youth participating in Small Christian Communities, the case study that is used is five SCCs from Kipawa Parish which are St. Antony of Padua SCCs, St. Luke Banabankitu SCCs, Blessed Anuarite SCCs, St. Mark the Evangelist SCCs and St. Karol Lwanga SCCs, By employing a quantitative approach and utilizing questionnaires, we seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and propose strategies to address them.

1.2 Problem Statement

The participation of youth in Small Christian Communities is declining in Tanzania despite the data showing that Tanzania is one of the world's fastest-growing young people population. Of the estimated 60 million people in Tanzania, more than 50% are under 18 and over 70% are under 30. Adolescents from over 12 million of the overall population of nearly 60 million, according to UNICEF 2022, (UNICEF, 2021) and the Catholic population is within these data but still, there is little participation of youth in the Small Christian Communities compared to adults 30 years and above.

1.3 Objective

Main Objective

a. To explore the factors that affect young people from attending Small Christian Communities.

Specific Objectives.

a. To assess the level of young people engagement and satisfaction within Small Christian Communities.

b. To understand the impact of external influences, such as technology, on young people participation.

c. To suggest practical recommendations to enhance young people involvement in Small Christian Communities.

1.4 Scope

This research focuses on examining the factors affecting youth participation in Small Christian Communities, the study comprises data collection through physical visits to the SCCs and participation, data was collected by using interviews through structured questioners; then the collected data was analyzed and come up with the report which drew a deeper understanding of the challenges hindering young people from participating in Small Christian Communities.

1.5 Significance of the research

a. Having an understanding of the challenges faced by youth in participating in Small Christian Communities.

b. Insights into the role of external influences on faith practices.

c. To enhance youth involvement in Small Christian Communities through the application of recommendations provided.

2. Literature Review

2.1 General Overview of SCCs in Some AMECEA Countries (Zambia, Tanzania, and Uganda)

AMECEA is the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa this comprises of Bishops of Countries locate in eastern side of African Continent.

Lusaka, Zambia: The AMECEA Plenary Study Conference on “Evangelization with its Central Issues: Inculturation, Small Christian Communities, and Priestly, Religious and Christian Formation” reiterated in its pastoral commitment of the Bishops of AMECEA by stating: “So we repeat that SCCs are not optional in our churches; they are central to the life of faith and the ministry of evangelization. “Also in Lusaka, Zambia 2008: AMECEA Study Conference on “Reconciliation Through Justice and Peace.” See references to the role and mission of Small Christian Communities. Action Plan: “Revisiting the Small Christian Communities Pastoral Option as a means of responding to the ministry of reconciliation through justice and peace.

Pastoral: To ensure that youth are not left confused in their faith, three elements have been pinpointed as the way forward. It is upon the priest or the pastoral agent to carefully decide, sometimes together with the youth within the parish, on the best way that help youth come together and be able to live their faith in an active and meaningful way. (Healey, 2022)

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania 2002; AMECEA Study Conference on “Deeper Evangelization in the Third Millennium.” Section 7 of the Pastoral Resolutions was on “Building the Church as a Family of God by Continuing to Foster and/or Revitalize the Small Christian Communities.” No. 43 states: “We recommend that a program on the theological and pastoral value of Small Christian Communities be included in the normal curriculum of the Major Seminaries and houses of formation of both men and women.”2006-2007 (Tanzania).

To promote the AMECEA Pastoral Priority of SCCs and to focus on ongoing Spiritual and Pastoral formation a “Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” was celebrated in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, (Tanzania). Later this was extended to a “National Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” for the whole of Tanzania. (AMECEA, 2019) (Healey, 2022)

Mukono, Uganda 2005: The AMECEA Study Conference on “Responding to the Challenges of HIV/AIDS within the AMECEA Region” had one pastoral resolution that emphasized: “Active

involvement of SCCs in reaching out to people with HIV/AIDS. SCC members as caregivers, counselors, etc.” NOTE: SCC members also reach out to refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), people traumatized by civil war, violence, and tribalism/ethnicity, street children, sick people, bereaved people, and other needy people. (Healey, 2022)

2.2 Lack of Youth in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa Causes and the Way Forward

2.2.1 Introduction

It has been realized in Small Christian Communities in East African countries the majority of members are women. In most cases, men represent a percentage that rarely goes beyond 10%. Worse still, there are no youth at all, except maybe some kids who are not up to 10 years old. The possible reasons why youth do not take active participation in the life of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the neighborhood.

2.2.2 Causes of the lack of youth participation in SCCs

The analysis here dwells on the youth belonging to the age bracket of 13-30 years old. Various reasons may be singled out for such attitudes, but the most remarkable ones are;

i. Age differences and physical development

It is generally agreed upon that the age bracket of 13-30 years old, especially 15-19 years old is a period when the individual experiences many physical changes. Biology provides more details on what takes place among men (boys) as well as women (girls). These physiological changes turn the person to be rebellious, adventurous-minded discovery-oriented, etc. Independence is one of the characteristics of this age. The individual feels that he/she is autonomous and nobody else should show him/her the way. This reality is even worse in the present society characterized by technological advancements, a society where the youth think that both parents have nothing to offer them. They are driven by the winds of modernity and urban life. To repair the mistakes made when they were young, the youth continued, the older people have the utmost obligation to attend SCCs as scheduled. Such a declaration reveals how rebellious that youth was, but also the misunderstanding that he has as regards the benefit of SCC in the neighborhood. Because they are discovery-oriented and want to explore the world more, the youth find it difficult to be in the same group as their parents who, they think, would limit their freedom. In most cases, they identify with

their age-mates and peers and feel at home when in their company. As a result, they can freely share their experience or what they think on a given topic without restriction. But when they attend the SCC meeting together with parents, the youth feel obliged to be in a world that is not theirs and speak a language that is for old people. This age difference is the major cause why youth do not attend SCC together with their parents or the Wazee of the neighborhood. (Konza, 2023)

ii. Unemployment

The second factor that we can think of as leading to this reticence and withdrawal of youth from SCC activities is unemployment. Especially in urban areas, many youth spend time running up and down, looking for jobs, and doing some tasks for income. They are uncertain about their future since the government does not offer them opportunities to lessen their suffering and misery. And because this hassling makes them tired, they find it difficult to attend SCC gatherings that in many places take place at a time that isn't favorable for them.

iii. Education

While other youth may have finished their studies and now look for jobs, others are still preoccupied with their studies. They go to school up to 5 p.m. Coming back home is not easy because of jams in the city. Thereafter they need to do their assignments and normally do not find time to attend SCCs.

iv. Peer pressure

For those students who live within the vicinity of their institution of learning, experience shows that they are mostly driven by peer pressure. The youth want to do what they see others do. This includes things like gossiping, chatting, drinking alcohol, swimming, dressing indecently, going for entertainment, making jokes, dancing, befriending one another, and so on, the pressure that drives them away from the SCCs in this age is very high so that the attendance of youth become small.

V. Failed pastoral

In as much as we blame the youth for being rebellious, justice should be done by acknowledging that most of our pastoral agents have failed in their ministry to the youth. All the youth who refused to attend mass or even participate in SCC were good and faithful when they were still below the age of seven. Some were even altar boys, others flower girls, and Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC) members. The pastoral agent has the noble responsibility of making sure that these youth grow in faith and enthusiasm for church activities just as when they were very young.

2.3 Way forward

Having analyzed the possible causes that prevent youth from attending SCC, the following section offers some suggestions to help young people or the youth engage in SCC without feeling threatened by their parents and those who are older than them. The intention is to create an accommodative environment, that is, an environment where youth will be free to share their faith in a youthful way, without feeling that they are being assessed or scrutinized by their parents.

a. Creating Youth SCCs

Perhaps the simplest way to answer the issue of age that separates youth from adult and thus prevent the first group from attending SCC together with the second group is the creation of Youth SCCs within the parish. In other words, the pastoral agent should ensure that youth meet together and share the Word of God as it is done in every SCC. However, care should be taken not to confuse the SCC with other youth gatherings in the parish. In other words, there should be a clear demarcation between youth SCC meetings and other youth activities that normally take place at the higher level of the parish. Otherwise, youth may come from different corners of the parish and such a gathering may lose its meaning of being the church in the neighborhood. (Konza, 2023)

b. Creating a Youth SCC within the Main SCC

For instance, if the SCC is called for instance St Joseph SCC in the parish, there should be, within that same SCC, a youthful SCC called St Joseph Young SCC composed of young people only. This is much better to keep with the nature of SCC that is the church in the neighborhood (a specific geographical area). The youth will agree on the appropriate time (on Sunday afternoon for instance) to have their gathering. If this suggestion is adopted, the priest or the pastoral agent should make sure that the activities are shared between the two branches and that they are equally represented at the parish level. More so, there should be collaboration among the steering committee members from these two branches so that they walk parallel to one another while engaging in the life of their SCC. Since both branches belong to the same truck, there should be "twinning" when it comes to taking responsibilities in church for readings, dusting and cleaning the church, bringing offerings, and formulating the Prayer of the Faithful. (Konza, 2023)

c. Conscientization of Youth

Another way to help the youth participate in SCCs even with their parents is through conscientization. Here the pastoral agent's starting point will be that just as everybody (young,

youth, parents, elderly, women, and men) takes part in the Eucharistic celebration on Sundays and other days, everybody is invited to the SCC gatherings as a structure that brings home the Eucharistic celebration. It is very important to attend the SCC meeting because it is a platform that allows people to share their experiences (both negative and positive) and also make decisions for the betterment or development of the community. (Konza, 2023)

3. Methods

3.1 Physical Visit and Participation

There was physical participation in five selected SCCs, where after prayer there was a participatory discussion with the parishioner on the subject presented to them. The respondent was given proper direction on how to answer also they were ensured with confidentiality and privacy of their information for them to give honest response.



Plate 1; Participation at St. Antony SCC and St. Luke Banabankitu at Kipawa Parish

3.2 Interview and data analysis

This was the mean of collecting data by use of more than 110 questionnaire sheet 97 filled copy was returned by the Small Christian Community members and then analyzed. The data was collected in five SCCs which are St. Antony of Padua SCC, St. Luke Banabankitu SCC, Blessed Anuarite SCC, St. Mark the Evangelist SCC and St. Karol Lwanga SCC. Those who were interviewed were not those who came to the SCC, the interview through a questionnaire had to follow people especially the youth to their homes and gatherings to get their responses on this subject.



Plate 2; Participation and data Collection at St. Mark the Evangelist SCCs Kipawa Parish.

3.3 Sample Selection

The sample selection used was systematic sample selection where we dealt with 10% of SCCs found at the parish SCCs which is five in number out of fifty, the SCCs selected were the ones with a high number of youth in the parish to get tangible data for this simple research.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

A thorough analysis of the data yielded the following thematic categories; which include age group and family life status, youth participation status, and influencing factors that affect their youth attendance. From the response obtained from the interview 95% of the respondents said that the SCC is important for the individual Christian growth and church growth at large in Christ and living the holiness and meaningful life.

4.2 Status of SCCs attendance as per Age group.

The total number of respondents is 97, within this number, the audience most intended were youth between the age of 12 -27. 41% of the respondents were to be obtained from their homes to respond to the questionnaires. The other age group reached 27 – 45 34%, 45 – above 22% and 3% did not respond to their age.

Within these statistics, only 19.6 % of youth aged 12 – 27 responded that they attend SCCs frequently. The remaining percentage is the age group above 27.

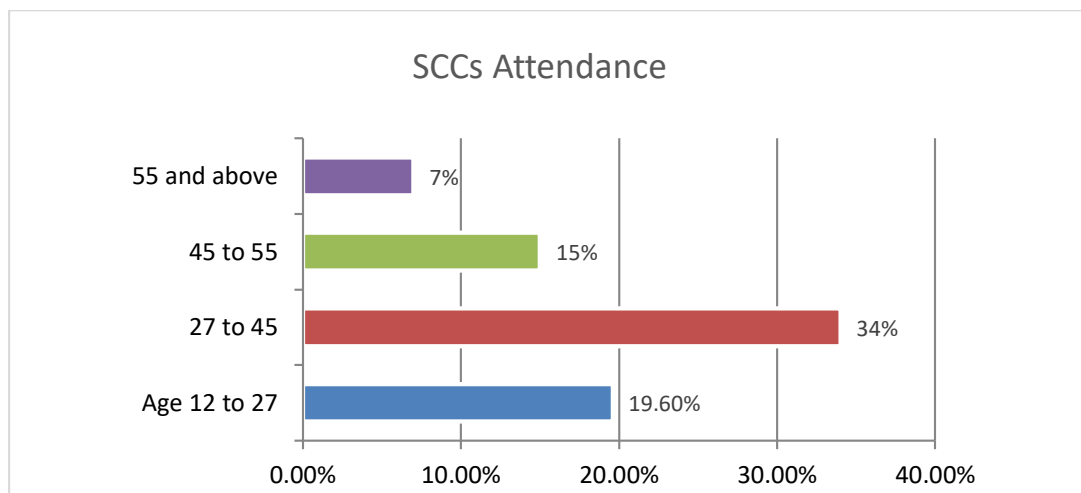


Figure 1; SCC attendants categorized into age group

4.3 Family as the foundation of faith

However, 86% of respondents said they came from a family, and the other 14% live alone and unmarried. Within this group of respondents who came from family expressed family unit especially spiritual life only 25% responded that they pray together as a family daily, 27%

responded they only pray separately alone in their rooms, 25 % responded they pray so rarely as a family, 18% responded that they do not pray at all as family and 3% did not respond anything. Family unit through prayer is the key factor unit any other family issues it is also a driving for youth to love to attend Small Christian Communities.

Reflection on the word of God as a family since family is the foundation of Small Christian Communities' togetherness in reflection of word of God will make a family one, especially in the Spiritual philosophy and conduct of the family which includes attendance of SCCs at large. 20 % of the faithful responded they read the bible every day in the family, 33% of the faithful said they don't read and reflect together as a family at all, 25% of the faithful Interviewed responded to do it so rarely as a family and Individual, 14 % responded that they do it alone without family participation, and 8 % didn't answer anything, this is the group of faithful who live alone, especially with no any marital status.

4.4 Reasons for Youth Participation in SCCs

Youth in the five Selected SCCs interviewed 19.6% responded they attend SCCs fully however the following were reasons that were raised by most of the youth that are affecting attendance both positively and negatively.

The total percentage of the youth interviewed is 41%. In this number 45% of youth answered that they would like to attend SCCs because of enlightenment of the Word of God and religious knowledge, 20% of the youth they answered attend the SCCs to join other faithful for unity and cooperation with them to get Christian guidance, 7.5% respondent that they attend SCCs due to social pressure normally it doesn't originate in the lovely willing, 5% they attend due to family influence, 15% this percent of youth said they attend SCCs because of both enlightening of the word of God, religious knowledge, and uniting with others faithful, 7.5% of youth did not have any reason for participation.

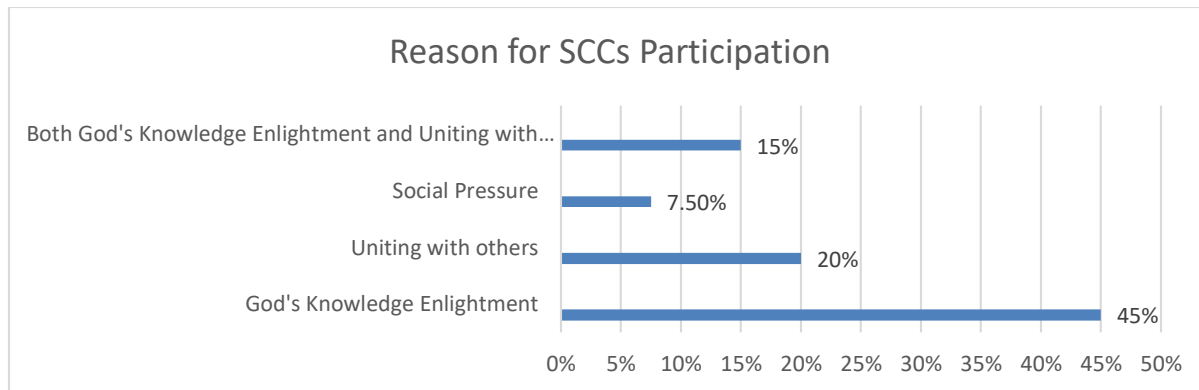


Figure 2; Reasons that make a faithful attend SCCs

Despite the good recommendation that was given by the youth and other faithful, the response to the question of satisfaction rate in participation of current SCCs sessions has not been along with the recommendation the response was as follows 25% responded that they were well satisfied with SCCs gatherings sessions, 60% responded that not satisfied with SCCs gatherings sessions several, 15% of youth said they have no idea and therefore they didn't give a response.

4.5 Influencing factors that affect their youth attendance.

“What do you think are the major reasons that hinder youth from participating in Small Christian Communities? a question provides room for structured and unstructured responses. 65% of youth respondents gave structured responses from the following answer options:

81% of youth responded time obstacle due to job, studies, or other responsibilities which acts as time obstacle to SCCs participation, while 15% responded little passion is a major reason, and 4% of youth responded that feeling of no ownership in SCCs is a factor that affects participation.

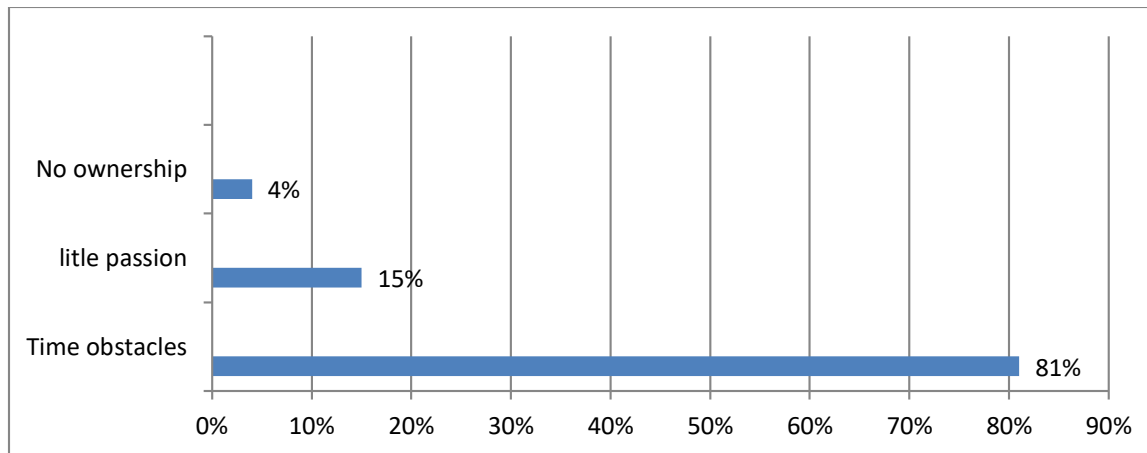


Figure 3; Factors that affecting youth participation in SCCs

Other youth respondents' percentage which is 35% had their answer out of the given choice as follows.

“Most youth fail to attend SCCs because of laziness habits”

“Parents failure in emphasizing on SCCs”

“Most youth have little faith”

“Some youth see attending SCCs is old fashion, that elder people are the one who are supposed to attend.”

4.6 Technology and Surroundings

In Tanzania, particularly in Dar es Salaam technology has already taken place to its extent to most of the youth in which it has both positive and negative impacts. The type of technology that has greatly taken place among the Youth, especially in the Dar es Salaam diocese is Information and Communication Technology where many Youths have access to the Internet through the use of smartphones, Tablet, iPads, Computer, these Vessels can access many and different mass media such WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Telegram, etc. these all have access to connection with different people, communication, and different materials downloads, etc.

During the interview 25% of youth uses social media frequently in a day compared to 35% of youth who rarely use social media a day while 40% of youth do not use social media at all this significant percentage included Secondary School student who attends school and are not allowed to own phone. The data shows that 60% of social media users responded that their use of social

media does not affect their prayer lives, while 25% confirmed that their use of social media affects their prayer lives, and 15% did not know if there is any impact.

Surroundings; Necessary environment, and responsibility are categorized here such as job, business, friends, family, and relationship during the interview the following responses were obtained 57.5% of youth-rated Surrounding environment affects their prayer life, while 30% responded this external factor doesn't affect anything in their spiritual lives and 12.5%, couldn't identify or know or take into consideration whether these factors can play big role to draw down or uplift their Spiritual life.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The data was collected by interview method through questionnaire which was followed by data analysis to observe Factors Affecting Youth Participation in Small Christian Communities. It has been observed with a good number of Interviewees who recommended that SCCs are essential tools for Christian life and therefore every Christian has to be part of it for personal growth and church at large, this can be proved when 80% of youth acknowledged the love for SCCs because of these key issues which are Enlightens with God's Knowledge and uniting with other SCCs members. Youth participation is the key topic here through interviews it was found only 19.6% of youth were found to be SCCs participants in the five visited SCCs at Kipawa Parish, this shows little participation since the number of Youth as per census under 30 is over 70% of Tanzania Population.

Despite the good recommendation by the faithful on the Importance of SCCs still, the youth attendance is observed to be lower. There is a great reason that youth responded that caused lower participation which is the time obstacle that is due to jobs, business, studies, timetable differences 81% of youth responded the same, and 15% lacked passion and willingness for religious issues, particularly SCCs. However, advancement in information technology has been found not to play a large part in affecting SCCs participation for youth.

Time obstacle and lack of lovely willingness that originates from true faith in Christ has been the main reason for the problem on board. However, these all are caused by poor faith foundation lack of passion for SCCs, and misallocation of priorities especially the problem of time obstacles. From family, the family spiritual life as per respondent's average of 22.5% of the interviewees said they

pray and reflect together as a family the rest 77.5% do not pray and reflect together as a family every day. This signifies a weak foundation of the SCCs because family is the foundation. Children and Parents are not bonded and confirmed by the Holy Spirit at home first.

Therefore, solving the issue of family togetherness in Spirit through prayer life and daily sharing of the word will give solution to problems such as time obstacle which is caused by misallocation of Priorities and poor faith foundation which cause a lack of passion for SCCs.

Recommendation

Having analyzed the potential causes that prevent youth from attending SCCs, the following section offers some suggestions to help young people, or the youth engage in SCC without feeling threatened by their parents and those who are older than them. The intention is to create an accommodative environment, that is, an environment where youth will be free to share their faith in a youthful way, without feeling that they are being assessed or scrutinized by their parents.

More emphasis to be put on the family foundation that it should be strong in faith through prayer life, a responsible life, life of charity to the needy to make youth stand by themselves by gaining lovely willingness to attend Small Christian Communities.

Strategies for pastoralism for the youth ministry especially by creating a sense of ownership for SSCs by giving chance to fulfill responsibility and receiving parental support from elders, Seminars that will give answers to most critical problems facing young people including faith, employment, financial literacy and relationships.

Putting more emphasis and energy on Youth SCCs gatherings where youth will meet pray and discuss their language for good will attract other young people who think SCCs belong to elders. It is agreed that the age bracket of 13-30 years old, especially 15-19 years old, is a period when the individual experiences many physical changes. Biology provides more details on what takes place among men (boys) as well as women (girls). These physiological changes turn the person into rebellious, adventurous-minded, discovery-oriented, etc. Independence is one of the characteristics of this age. The individual feels that he/she is autonomous and nobody else should show him/her the way.

Because they are discovery-oriented and want to explore the world more, the youth find it difficult to be in the same group as their parents who, they think, would limit their freedom. In most cases, they identify with their age-mates and peers and feel at home when in their company. As a result,

they can freely share their experience or what they think on a given topic without restriction. But when they attend the SCC meeting together with parents, the youth feel obliged to be in a world that is not theirs and speak a language that is for old people.

Emphasis on the key activities for SCCs; how the SCC was intended for, include prayer, fellowship, eating together, keeping apostles' teachings which are sharing of the word as per Act 2:42- 44 "And they continued steadfastly in Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of the bread and in prayers..." The SCCs gathering must concentrate on that in terms of time and content because that is what is needed as per the response by 80 % of interviewees, they said they attend SCCs because of the word of God's enlightenment and fellowship life. The current satisfaction rate for SCCs was 25% and 75% did not see satisfaction in the current SCC session. The above more concentration in prayer, Word of God life, fellowship life, and charity life will raise the satisfaction rate.

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