A FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION’S PROGRAM PLANNING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION: AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of LORILEE SANDMANN)

ABSTRACT

This action research case study investigated the dynamics of program planning around youth engagement in a faith-based organization. Four research questions guided the study: (1) What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization?; (2) How are the challenges negotiated during the program planning process?; (3) What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth?; and (4) What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth?

The principal investigator worked alongside 10 congregants from the faith-based organization through the action research phases of construction, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. Program planning theory, negotiation theory, and systems change theory informed the project. Data were collected using a combination of survey instruments, meeting notes, researcher reflection interviews, critical incident exit interviews, observation, and researcher journal entries.

Based on the analysis of the findings, four conclusions were drawn: (1) Negotiation of culture and power is required at the planning table and is critical for a successful intervention; (2)
tenets from interest-based negotiation can be utilized to overcome disagreements during program planning and to advance decision making; (3) engaging in the action research process can promote action learning at individual, group, and system levels; and (4) youth program planning is dependent on corresponding changes in other parts of faith-based organizations. Study implications include attentiveness to commitment and population at the planning table, inclusion of youth and parents in planning, and the need to change other parts of the system to accommodate and sustain change effort.

INDEX WORDS: Action Research, Faith-Based Organizations, Program Planning Theory, Negotiation Theory, Systems Change Theory, Youth Engagement
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2015
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DEDICATION

To

Deaconess Elizabeth Bolanle Ajayi
My late mother

Who taught me the value of education and instilled in me the love of Christ and resilience,
without which this project would have been neither initiated nor completed.

And

Olufemi Alade
My husband

For your unwavering love, encouragement, and support

And

Tooni, Tosin, and Tomi Alade
Our children

Thanks for your understanding, support, and prayers. Words cannot express my gratitude to God
for blessing me with the three of you. I will always love you!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give all glory to God for directing my steps toward this unique program and for His faithfulness in providing all that I needed to complete it. The good Lord was my very present help in the various times of need.

Next, I am grateful to Dr. Lorilee Sandmann, my major advisor, whom I now consider my destiny helper. She interviewed me during the application process and by an act of God’s providence also became the shepherd to see me through to the end. Words cannot express my gratitude for your labor of love. It is my prayer that God repays you and your descendants for your investment in my success.

I appreciate the contributions of other members of my doctoral committee as well: Dr. Wendy Ruona, Dr. Janette Hill, Dr. Khalil Dirani, and Dr. Robert Hill. Thank you for your time and the invaluable knowledge with which you provided guidance during my doctoral journey. This work became whole as a result of the diverse ingredients each of you contributed.

I also would like to acknowledge the value of two other EdD program faculty members, Dr. Karen Watkins and Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, for your hard work and dedication to grooming another group of scholar practitioners. Your tutelage has left an indelible mark on my professional and personal development. I promise to make you proud wherever I go.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues in Cohort 2 of the EdD program. Learning with you and from you was an honor. I consider each of you a scholar, and I hope we will continue to support one another in future endeavors.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................................ ix

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................................ x

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................................... 1

   The Problem: Youth Engagement in Immigrant Churches ................................................................. 2
   Insider Researcher Role ....................................................................................................................... 5
   Study Purpose and Research Questions ............................................................................................. 6
   Significance of the Study .................................................................................................................... 7

2 LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................................................................... 9

   Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................................................... 10
   Program Planning Theory ............................................................................................................... 11
   Negotiation Theory ........................................................................................................................ 17
   Systems Change Theory .................................................................................................................. 20
   Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 30

3 METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................................. 31

   Action Research Methodology ....................................................................................................... 32
   Research Design ............................................................................................................................... 34
   Case Study ....................................................................................................................................... 35
Study Participants ........................................................................................................36
Data Collection ........................................................................................................38
Data Analysis ...........................................................................................................45
Ethical Issues ...........................................................................................................47
Trustworthiness .........................................................................................................49
Study Limitations .....................................................................................................51
Researcher’s Subjectivity .........................................................................................51

4 CASE STUDY REPORT ..............................................................................................53
Context: An Immigrant Faith-Based Organization ..................................................53
Action Research Participants ....................................................................................56
Case Study Story .........................................................................................................61
Phase 1: Preconception – Program Construction (Pre-Planning) .............................62
Phase 2: Gestation – Program Planning ....................................................................67
Phase 3: Labor and Delivery – Program Implementation ........................................79
Phase 4: Postpartum – Program Evaluation ..............................................................86
Conclusion ................................................................................................................93

5 FINDINGS ................................................................................................................95
Challenges to Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation .....................96
Negotiation of Challenges during Program Planning Process .............................104
Changes that Resulted in Increased Youth Engagement ......................................109
Individual, Group, and System Learning ...............................................................114

6 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS ..............................................122
Summary of Findings ..............................................................................................122
Conclusions and Discussion ................................................................. 127
Implications for Practice .................................................................... 135
Implications for Theory ...................................................................... 139
Recommendations for Future Research .............................................. 143
Conclusion .......................................................................................... 145

REFERENCES .................................................................................... 147

APPENDICES

A  INFORMED CONSENT SAMPLE .......................................................... 159
B  NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY .......................................................... 161
C  RESEARCHER REFLECTION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ......................... 163
D  CRITICAL INCIDENT EXIT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ......................... 165
E  EVENTS TIMELINE FOR CONSTRUCTION PHASE .............................. 168
F  NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY ANALYSIS ........................................... 169
G  SUMMARY OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION MEETINGS ..................... 170
H  YOUTH ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION SURVEY – YOUTH COPY ............ 172
I  YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAM PLANNING SURVEY – ADULT COPY ........ 174
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Essential Components of Transformative Systems Change ........................................25
Table 2: Empirical Studies Table ........................................................................................................27
Table 3: Research Questions, Data Collected, and Data Analysis ...................................................35
Table 4: Action Research Team Profile ................................................................................................38
Table 5: Study Participants and Interview Types ..............................................................................44
Table 6: Summary of Planning Meetings Held ....................................................................................68
Table 7: Results of Brainstorming Session with Youth ......................................................................72
Table 8: Youth Engagement Activities ................................................................................................76
Table 9: Overview of Findings .............................................................................................................96
Table 10: Challenges to Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation .................................97
Table 11: Strategies for Negotiating Challenges during Program Planning Process .......................104
Table 12: Changes that Resulted in Increased Youth Engagement .....................................................110
Table 13: Learning as a Result of Action Research .............................................................................115
Table 14: Selected Empirical Studies Comparison ............................................................................140
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Theoretical Framework of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang’s Model of Systems Change</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Overview of Research Design</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Fisher, Ury, and Paton (2011) Circle Chart</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Illustration of Action Research Team’s Decision-Making Process</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Barnes (2008) posits that various faith-based organizations, including churches, play an active role in providing avenues for youth engagement. The positive impact of religion on human behaviors has been well-documented by scholars, and there is a considerable body of evidence demonstrating that religiosity reduces adolescent participation in a number of negative personal and social behaviors, while promoting other positive conduct (Gibson, 2008). Such affirming behaviors include higher academic achievement and interpersonal competence (Irvin, Farmer, Leung, Thompson, & Hutchins, 2010; Metzger, Crean, & Forbes-Jones, 2009; Toldson & Anderson, 2010), increased likelihood of engaging in community volunteering (Brady & Hapenny, 2010; Gibson, 2008), and delayed sexual activity (Burdette & Hill, 2009; Mueller, Bensyl, Vesely, Oman, & Aspy, 2010), among others.

Although many studies have demonstrated that religion has a constructive impact on adolescent behaviors, some research has shown otherwise. Petts and Jolliff (2008) linked religious participation to increased depression in Asian adolescents. Nweneka (2007) examined the sexual practices of two churches in southern Nigeria and discovered that sexual activity of committed church youth was similar to those of other youth who did not attend church; this prompted the researcher’s admonition that churches need to be more proactive in addressing young people’s sexual and reproductive health matters. Other researchers (Koniak-Griffin, Lesser, Uman, & Nyamathi, 2003; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000) found that more religious teenagers were less likely to practice safe sex.
Despite the inconsistency of findings within the research literature, the historical role of faith-based organizations in engaging youth cannot be ignored. This study focuses on the efforts of an ethnic faith-based organization to effectively engage its youth, with the goal of reaping some of the aforementioned positive benefits. This chapter provides background information about the challenge of youth engagement in immigrant churches. My position as the principal researcher is then described and its basis explained. The purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the project are highlighted, and the chapter ends with a discussion on the significance of the study.

The Problem: Youth Engagement in Immigrant Churches

Over the last four decades, the shift in the origins of immigrants in United States has led to greater diversity of religious backgrounds in U.S. communities (Akresh, 2011). Many immigrants are also traditional in their values, which include the importance of hard work and delayed gratification. The desire for an environment that fosters these important values often provides the rationale for establishing immigrant churches and other faith-based organizations (Yang, 2011). (Throughout this report, the terms “ethnic church” and “immigrant church” have been used interchangeably to refer to churches catering to any minority ethnic group.) One such faith-based organization, referred to pseudonymously here as Salvation Global Ministries (SGM), offers the context for this study.

SGM is one of 21 affiliate branches of a non-denominational church, which is headquartered in Nigeria. SGM is located in the southeastern United States. According to church records, there are 310 registered members (182 adults and 128 children). Of this number, 95% are of Nigerian origin. The remaining 5% are originally from other African countries and
the Caribbean, or are African Americans. Nearly 90% of the adult congregants are first-
generation immigrants.

According to Yang (2011), the immigrant church is the largest growing segment within
the American evangelical church. These faith-based organizations provide immigrants with a
variety of resources as they try to resettle in a new country. Historically, Black churches have
been instrumental in the relocation and resettlement of large groups of immigrants in the United
States (Chatters, Taylor, Bullard, & Jackson, 2009). Similarly, one of the main duties of the
Coptic priests of Christian Orthodox Church was to find housing and jobs for newcomers (Van
Dijk & Botros, 2009). According to Akhtar (1999), the establishment of immigrant religious
institutions allows for new immigrants to realize cultural reproduction, impart their heritage and
religion to their children, negotiate and construct ethno-religious identities, and integrate
newcomers.

However, immigrant churches have faced various challenges. For example, Form (2000)
examined the reasons for the closure of three Italian Protestant churches and found two main
factors: the churches’ inability to recruit more members and a distinct lack of interest among the
second-generation immigrants. On the other hand, evidence suggests that making a conscious
effort to meet the needs of the youth is crucial to the survival of immigrant churches. Activities
such as hosting youth-directed sports tournaments, building gymnasiums annexed to churches,
coordinating weekend youth meetings, planning trips, and training youth counselors have all
been utilized to keep the youth in church (Van Dijk & Botros, 2009).

Furthermore, the expectation that faith-based organizations will guide and protect the
congregations’ children against Americanization by reinforcing traditions (Chen, 2006)
continues to be a challenge. There is growing concern among churches about losing their youth
to other religious and non-religious forces (Chang-Ho & Tameifuna, 2011)—a concern echoed by members of SGM.

For the purpose of this study, the ethno-social construct of SGM provided a unique perspective from which to address the problem of youth engagement. In addition to exhibiting a desire for the youth to possess the well-documented benefits of church involvement (Black, 2008; Gane & Kaijai, 2006; O’Connor, Hodge, & Alexander, 2002; Schwartz, 2006), the adult members of SGM also wanted to use the church as an avenue to impart Nigerian culture to the next generation. This is congruent with Warner’s (2000) assertion that an immigrant religious institution is a means or venue for intragroup dynamics, and a place where relations between generations and genders are worked out. Such institutions help immigrant parents maintain cultural ties with their country of origin, while the children learn more about their parents’ values with the assistance and through the modeling of other adults of the same ethnicity. Congregants view the church as a primary way of resisting complete cultural assimilation and preserving cherished aspects of the traditional Nigerian identity (Cao, 2005).

This research project addressed the need for SGM to be more effective in the engagement of its youth membership (aged 13-18 years old). Church members, through a survey instrument, interviews, and brainstorming sessions (conducted between October and December 2013), agreed that the church needed to engage the youth better by focusing on their spiritual and educational development. There was a general concern among the adults and parents that the church’s theological doctrine was under attack by secular society. The consensus was that the church needed to be even more proactive in reinforcing its principles to the youth. This concern strengthens Ebaugh & Chafetz’s (2000) finding that many first-generation immigrants view the church as a place where they can gain immunity from perceived social ills.
Some members of Salvation Global Ministries also linked church growth with youth engagement, believing that if the youth were engaged and empowered within the church, parental commitment would also improve. This would likely increase participation of family members and friends as well. Thus, youth engagement in SGM was linked to church sustainability. Some youth do not return to the church after leaving home for college, and some members believed that this was because the youth saw no reason to return. There were concerns that the unchecked continuation of such a trend could potentially lead to the church’s demise.

In response to these concerns, the project involved planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs within the organization. It also entailed the investigation of these processes in order to gain insight into the problems as well as the potential for replication of solutions. Finally, through its action research approach, the project built the capacity of the congregation to sustain these efforts.

**Insider Researcher Role**

As a longtime member of SGM (11 years) and a regular volunteer, I was positioned as an insider researcher to lead and facilitate change around youth engagement. I also stood to benefit from the resolution of the focal concerns of this project because I have three young children who will become part of the church’s youth in a few years. Therefore, I had a vested interest in the study.

The church pastor, whose responsibilities include overseeing the daily administrative affairs of the church, granted me permission to conduct the research within SGM. It is important to note that this decision was not a unilateral one. After my initial meeting with the pastor, during which I requested permission to conduct the research, I also sought to present my research proposal to the leadership team at its next meeting, in hopes of fostering the collaborative nature
of my action research method (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The leadership meeting was attended by the pastor, three assistant pastors, and eight deacons. All members of the team were favorable to my proposal, as they believed that our mutual experience and findings would be beneficial to the church. Consequently, a unanimous agreement was reached to permit the use of the church for this research.

**Study Purpose and Research Questions**

To catalyze planning and comprehend SGM’s efforts to effectively engage its youth, an action research (AR) study was conducted. The purpose of the research was to investigate the program planning dynamics in a faith-based organization which led to youth engagement. The action research also sought to gauge the collaborative efforts of a group of congregants and to initiate and sustain change within this faith-based organization. The research questions guiding this inquiry were as follows:

1. What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization?
2. How are the challenges negotiated during the program planning process?
3. What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth?
4. What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth?

To answer these research questions, the AR methodology was employed. The AR phases included construction, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. All four phases were conducted collaboratively with concerned congregants, current youth teachers, and myself as an insider researcher.
Significance of the Study

The relationships between youth development and involvement in faith-based organizations, including churches, have been studied extensively. This action research project built on existing knowledge bases by: (a) presenting a case study that explored the process of creating youth engagement programs by using the program planning theory within a faith-based organization; (b) identifying the challenges of program planning within an immigrant/ethnic (specifically Nigerian) church, a unique context that has only been minimally explored in the United States; and (c) highlighting the types of negotiations that take place in a faith-based organization as program planning is being executed.

This work has practical significance. It is relevant to faith-based leaders, youth ministers, and other individuals or groups interested in best practices and processes of program planning and negotiation. This study also benefits ethnic/immigrant organizations and other minority groups as they work to coordinate their activities within the larger context of U.S. society. Strategies for addressing challenges and engaging youth can be gained from this study. In uncovering the challenges faced during and resolved through the planning and implementation of youth engagement programs, this study helps organizations identify areas where change is needed to facilitate and sustain program planning.

In addition to contributing to practical knowledge, this study also advances the fields of adult education and organizational development by providing understanding of the dynamics of leading change through program planning in an ethnic, faith-based organization in the United States; indeed, a review of the literature reveals a lack of research into African faith-based organizations in the U.S. As congregants learn and change through their participation in this
research project, the study provides a theoretical basis for exploring program planning, adult learning, and organizational dynamics within a similar context.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the three theories that informed the various stages of the action research project and the types of information gathered: program planning theory, negotiation theory, and systems theory. In addition, empirical studies in which these theories have been tested and others that are relevant to the project are highlighted. The chapter discusses program planning theory to show the work of planners and the types of activities they engage in as they plan programs. This is followed by an examination of negotiation theory, facilitates the comprehension of the bargaining aspect of program planning and presents a model for engaging in negotiations that have the potential to produce win-win results. The chapter then examines systems theory to demonstrate the interrelatedness of system parts and how change in one part of a system can be sustained through changes in other parts. The results of studies centering on some of the interventions that were implemented in the project are also examined and collated in an empirical findings table.

Over 90 of the University of Georgia Library's GALILEO databases were accessed to obtain information from peer-reviewed journal articles. The keywords used to carry out database searches included “church,” “religion,” “youth,” “adolescent,” “program planning,” “systems theory,” “negotiation,” and “faith-based organizations”. Additionally, textbooks, doctoral dissertations, and classroom lecture notes were utilized to provide a solid grounding for the project.
Theoretical Framework

“Theories do not solve problems in the world; people do. Nevertheless, good theory is what we need when we get stuck. Theories can help alert us to problems, remind us of what we care about or prompt our practical insights into cases we confront” (Forester 1989, p. 12). The preceding quote aptly captures the role of theories, as well as the understanding of their application to this project. A visual illustration of the theories and their relationship to this study is shown below:

![Diagram](image-url)

*Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study.*
Program Planning Theory

Cervero and Wilson (1994a) explain planning practice as a social activity in which people construct educational programs by negotiating personal, organizational, and social interests in contexts marked by socially structured relations of power. SGM is one of such contexts. The Cervero and Wilson (1994a, 2006) model of program planning is one of the major theoretical foundations of this action research project because of the relevance of the key concepts of power, interest, negotiation, and responsibility. In particular, the model is applicable to this study because it provides necessary guidance for navigating the dynamics of group planning work. Houle (1972) also asserts that for planning efforts to stand a chance of success, they must be centered on realities, not on forms or abstractions.

Scholars agree, however, that the work of program planning is unpredictable; therefore, all the dynamics cannot be accounted for or captured in totality by any particular theory or model. Boyle (1981) posits that “a rational model is rarely, if ever, achieved in the practical work of planning with people” (p. 42). Sork and Caffarella (1989) opine that only a naïve individual would believe that any single planning model can appropriately depict the actual practice of planning. Consequently, Foley (1999) issued a call for a model that is relevant to practitioners: “Educators need a theory that both explains and enables action” (p. 130).

The Cervero and Wilson (2006) theory is based on the belief that people will not apply theory to practice but that theory organizes attention to possibilities of action. The authors use the metaphor of the planning table as a way to ensure the applicability of theoretical concepts in the real world of planning. They agree that a planning table could be a physical one where planning decisions are made; yet, more often, the “table” is actually metaphorical, accounting for the judgments people make through email or faxes, in offices, hallways, or restrooms, or at social
gatherings (Cervero & Wilson, 1996). Although there were physical planning tables, the metaphorical planning table was more predominant in relation to the action research work at SGM. As a result of time constraints among AR team members, as well as the prevalence of telecommunication, many decisions were made via email, social media, chat groups, and SMS messages. Some decisions were made in the middle of church services.

Cervero and Wilson (2006) identify four dynamics in operation at the planning tables where educational programs are produced. AR team members, who met to plan youth engagement programs at SGM, experienced all four dynamics, which include the following:

1. Power relations enable and constrain people’s access to, and capacity to act at, the planning table.
2. People represent interests at the table.
3. Ethical commitments define who should be represented at the table.
4. Negotiation is the central practical action at the table. (pp. 84-85)

The concepts of power, interests, negotiation, and responsibility were also evident in the program planning action research program conducted at SGM. As a faith-based organization, SGM also embodies power structures that need to be negotiated during program planning. Several scholars agree that connections exist among the technical, political, and ethical dimensions of planning (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994a; Sork, 2000; Sork & Newman, 2004). Sork (2000) even posits that in addition to being technically capable adult education planners must become “politically aware” and “ethically sensitive.” The competencies highlighted by Sork were found to be necessary for the success of AR team members involved with planning youth programs within SGM. The subsections below describe the concepts upon
which the Cervero and Wilson (2006) model is based, in relation to their relevance in the action research carried out at SGM.

**Power**

Power can be defined as the capacity to act that is available to people as a result of their position and participation in social and organizational relationships (Apple, 1992; Giddens, 1979; Isaac, 1987; Winter, 1996). Power frames all human interactions (Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1979). Planners’ work embodies the struggle for knowledge and power as it is embedded in the wider forces that structure social and organizational life (Cervero, Wilson, & Associates, 2001). Effective organizational work requires one to understand conflict, analyze interests, and exercise power (Morgan, 1996).

The concept of power within the Cervero and Wilson (2006) model takes into account the following three characteristics of power:

1. Power is a social and relational characteristic. It is not simply something that people possess and use against one another.

2. It is necessary to distinguish between power relations as a structural characteristic and people’s exercise of their power, which is an individual activity.

3. Although power relations are relatively stable, they are continuously negotiated at planning tables. (Cervero & Wilson, 2006)

The second and third characteristics above were pertinent to this study. As a faith-based organization, SGM had a power structure in which the pastor stood at the helm of affairs and the assistant pastors and deacons acted as subordinates. The workings of this structure were demonstrated at AR meetings, where the pastor’s wife was in attendance. Members of the AR team quickly deferred to her judgment because of her structurally powerful position within SGM.
In other cases, AR team members negotiated power based on their roles in the church and knowledge of issues being discussed. These power relations were evident throughout the AR project.

**Interests**

“People with interests plan programs” (Cervero & Wilson, 2006, p. 89). Ignoring the reality of organizational politics during planning can be likened to trying to cross a crowded intersection with both eyes closed (Forester, 1989). The complex set of interests are “predispositions, embracing goals, values, desires and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one direction or another” (Morgan, 1997, p. 161). “Almost always, people at the planning table are representing the interests of others” (Cervero & Wilson, 2006 p. 90).

From the onset of this AR project, the participation of team members was the result of varying interests. During the needs assessment phase, the items on the survey that was developed indicated the interests held by the congregants who attended the brainstorming meeting, representing different groups. After the selection of the AR focus, volunteers elected to serve on the AR team to promote certain interests. As the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs continued, volunteers articulated more interests.

Cervero and Wilson (2006) stress that it is important for planners to ask the questions, “Whose interests are at stake in this program?” and “What are those interests?” The answers to these questions were crucial to refocusing the AR team when conflicting interests became apparent during discussions. AR team members also continually engaged in negotiation.

**Negotiation**

Negotiation is the action that takes place at the planning tables where people confer, discuss, and argue in the process of making judgments about how to produce important program
features (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). The literature suggests that planners should work at the planning table to produce both educational and political outcomes by using negotiation strategies that “honor democratic deliberations, rather than restrict them” (Forester, 1999, p. 9). A fundamental ethical question for planners, who are constantly negotiating power and interests to shape the program, rests in determining whose interests get represented at the planning table (Cervero & Wilson, 1996).

Negotiations took place throughout this AR project, but the approach adopted at each point of negotiation depended on the situation and the individuals involved. This is congruent with Baptiste’s (2000) position that different situations call for different overall approaches to negotiation. Newman (1994) identifies three different approaches to negotiation: consultation, bargaining, and disputes. The consultation approach is applicable when “two or more parties, whose common interests outweigh any conflicting ones, come together with a view to sharing information and solving problems, to their mutual advantage” (p. 154). In this approach, people treat each other as friends, and there is a high level of trust; the amount of power that people have when they arrive at the table is relatively unimportant because everyone has a similar set of interests driving their judgment. The bargaining approach is usually evident in situations “where two or more parties, with both common and conflicting interests, come together to talk with a view to reaching agreement” (p. 153). This is because there is a likelihood that the final outcome will not be to everyone's advantage. Unlike in consultations, the amount of power that people have at the table in a case like this is very important. For example, bargaining is prevalent in negotiations that are strongly influenced by people’s political relationships: “One party may lose out badly in negotiation and another may gain considerably (p. 153)” based on how and whether people choose to exercise their power. The disputes approach is the most confrontational. It is
utilized when “parties whose conflicting interests outweigh any common ones, engage with one another, each with a view of winning—that is, furthering its own interests or gaining ascendancy for its own viewpoint” (p. 154). This occurs “when talks have broken down, when distrust is open and rampant, when battle lines are drawn, and when opposing sides seek actively, freely and knowingly to frustrate each other’s causes” (p. 154). In these situations, the amount of power that people bring to the table is vital to both the strategy that needs to be used and the likelihood that a person will achieve his or her objective.

In the course of this project, the consultation approach was the most prominent because of the identification of underlying, general interests. However, there were several occasions when the bargaining approach was utilized. There was no need for the disputes approach during the project.

**Responsibility**

The Cervero and Wilson (2006) vision of good planning is based on an ethical commitment to nurturing substantively democratic planning across educational outcomes, and people’s social and political relationships. An ethical commitment to substantively democratic planning refers to the mindset that all people who are affected by an educational program should “be involved in the deliberation of what is important” (Apple, 1992, p. 11). A democratic planning process simply means that real choices will be put before people about what collective action to take in the construction of a given program (Cervero & Wilson, 1995).

At the level of substantive negotiations, Cervero and Wilson (2006) argue that the commitment to democratic planning will produce programs that enlarge rather than restrict people’s life chances. Additionally, during negotiations regarding people’s social and political relationships, the authors encourage planners to focus on the democratic construction of the
planning table (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, 1994b). Forester (1993) underscores the importance of planning efforts through the principle of “pragmatics with vision” (p. 39), which stresses the need to maintain democratic values and to match planning strategies with social and political relationships to nurture that commitment.

Overall, the Cervero and Wilson (2006) model of program planning provided a broad framework for this study. The issue of democratic planning, upon which the concept of responsibility is based, closely aligned with study’s AR methodology. Action Research is a participatory and democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in the participatory worldview (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). As a result of the amount of negotiation that came into play, it is important and instructive to explore negotiation theory in some depth.

**Negotiation Theory**

Negotiation is a means of getting something from others; we may not all think of ourselves as negotiators, but we all negotiate something, every day (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011). The Fisher and Ury (1981) model of negotiation, which was originally known as “interest-based negotiation” and later renamed “principled negotiation,” along with its recent updates, informed and guided this action research study.

The transition from “interest-based negotiation” to “principled negotiation” was heralded by Fisher and Ury to split “issue identification” into two parts, first by separating people from the problem, in order to highlight the substantive issues, and then by understanding any underlying interests (American Arbitration Association, 2008, p. 74). In their most recent update, Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011) added the power of commitment and effective communication to the ways in which a negotiator can enhance his or her negotiating power.
Against a backdrop of the now-widespread use of email, telephone, and SMS communication—in contrast to when face-to-face meetings were once the only option—the authors also address the impact of telecommunication on negotiation. They recommend addressing difficult situations (e.g., those involving emotions and relationships) in person whenever possible. They further suggest having initial meetings in person or over the phone, whereas the bulk of the ensuing conversation will be carried out via email.

The Fisher and Ury (2011) model continues to focus on understanding and building on interests, and uses problem-solving tools to avoid positional conflicts and achieve better outcomes (Walton & McKersie, 1991). Principled negotiation combines Mary Parker Follet’s ideas of constructive and integrative conflict resolution from the 1920s with Richard and Walton’s basic model of integrative, interest-based bargaining for labor relations in the 1960s (Menkel-Meadow, 2006). Integrative conflict resolution focuses on the real needs and interests of the bargaining parties; it frames negotiations as interactions with win-win potential and looks for ways of creating value, or “expanding the pie,” so that there is more to share between parties (Friedman, 1993). The integrative approach uses objective criteria, seeks to create conditions of mutual gain, and emphasizes the importance of group problem-solving and exchanging information between parties (Lewicki, Barry, Saunders, & John, 2003).

Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011) posit that in order to reach a successful resolution of an issue, negotiation method(s) should (1) be efficient, (2) improve or at least not damage the relationship between the parties, and (3) produce a wise agreement. The framework of principled negotiation meets three criteria. A wise agreement is one that meets the legitimate interest or interests of each side to the extent possible, resolves conflicting interests fairly, is durable, and takes community interests into account (Fisher et al., 2011, p. 4). These features
make principled negotiation crucial to the collaborative nature of action research, as they are best suited to address the needs of a faith-based organization.

The four underlying laws of principled negotiation are as follows:

1. Separate people from the problem.
2. Focus on interests, not positions.
3. Invent multiple options looking for mutual gains, before deciding what to do.
4. Insist that the result be based on some objective criteria. (Fisher et al., 2011, p. 11)

Principled negotiation demands a collaborative approach, not a confrontational one. Even where parties have different views, this kind of negotiation requires those parties to work side by side to attack the problem, not one another. The method permits reaching a gradual consensus on a joint decision efficiently.

Menkel-Meadow (2009) views principled negotiation as a call for major cultural change because its central tenet of forging a joint agreement to meet the needs of both parties is actually not the way most parties approach negotiations. When most opposing parties arrive at a negotiation table, they are adversarial. They may not be openly hostile, but they are there to get the best deal for themselves and may not be overly concerned about potential damage to the opposing party.

Wolski (2012) identifies some limitations to principled negotiations. These include single-issue negotiations, conflicting interests and/or values, conflicting objective criteria, the mixed nature of negotiations, and instances where interest-based negotiation is just not possible or desirable. Other criticisms leveled at principled negotiation include its failure to address the relevance of culture (Avruch, 2000; Brett, 2001), gender (Menkel-Meadow, 2000), and different
substantive contexts of negotiation (Menkel-Meadow, 2001). The assumption of no scarcity in the number of possible options has also been highlighted (White, 1984).

In spite of these criticisms, there is a consensus that principled negotiation offers an excellent framework and provides useful tools for many negotiations (Senger, 2002). Menkel-Meadow (2006) commend Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991) for developing a powerful tool for teaching and bringing people, groups, and nations together productively. Byrne (2002) utilized principled negotiation to identify the potential benefits of utilizing cognitive psychology in understanding the problem-solving process.

Principled negotiation requires parties to see one another as partners in creating new entities, new and better relationships and resources, even when in disagreement. This cultural change is a subset of an overarching systemic change that SGM is seeking as it works to develop and sustain youth engagement. Wilson’s (2001) soft systems model is similar to that of principled negotiation. It is a goal-driven approach to organizational development that involves building a vision for and identifying what the organization must do to achieve its purpose. The differences between the modeled vision and the organization’s actual, current situation help to identify where improvement is desirable (Bustard, 2002). Since the youth ministry (which caters to the needs of youth in SGM) is part of the larger church system, the need to incorporate systems theory in framing this study cannot be overemphasized.

**Systems Change Theory**

The third theory that informed this study is Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang’s (2007) framework for systems change. The framework is particularly relevant to this action research study because it is grounded in the fields of systems thinking and organizational change. Systems are a collection of parts that interact and function as a whole (Ackoff & Rovin, 2003).
Within the context of systems change, a “system” refers to the actors, activities, and settings that are directly or indirectly perceived to influence or be affected by a particular situation (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). “Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is an instrument for viewing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing pattern of changes rather than static snapshots” (Senge, 2006, p. 68). According to Foster-Fishman et al. (2007), systems change refers to an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system. It is an episodic and transformative change pursuit that focuses on shifting the status quo by engaging in the following:

1. Understanding the problem from different perspectives.
2. Locating root causes to systemic problems by identifying system parts and their pattern of interdependency that explain the status quo.
3. Identifying leverage points that will create second order change from the above information (p. 201).

In the case of this study, SGM is the system of which the youth are a part. All the parts of SGM were considered and integrated into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of youth development programs. The AR team discovered that there were different opinions held by different people about the reason for youth disengagement in SGM. The views were all considered by the AR team in a bid to understand the problem, identify the root causes, and intervene in a manner that would address the core of the issues not only among the youth but also within the entire SGM congregation. It was understood that change in the level and effectiveness of youth engagement at SGM required change in other parts of SGM. When the cause of a problem is rooted in the fundamental nature of the system, second-order change is more likely to
lead to more comprehensive and long-term solutions because it attends to the underlying root cause which can ultimately shift the status quo (Seidmann, 1988).

Some scholars of systemic thinking and behavior (e.g. Senge, 2006) maintain that most systems contain a complex web of interdependent parts; thus, “leveraging change in one part will lead to the desired outcome, only if concurrent shifts happen in the relational and compositional elements of the system” (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007, p. 199). Figure 2 depicts how a change in one part of system affects other parts of the system because of their interrelatedness. Furthermore, the outcome of the change initiative as shown in Figure 2 is not linear or predictable. That is why the actions of the AR team were embedded in systems thinking. Team members shared an understanding of the premise that interventions and policies relating to youth engagement in SGM must be considered across the system of SGM in order to achieve effective and sustainable outcomes.

Although such a mindset could potentially lead to a system overhaul, this model for system change focuses on episodic change that tends to be planned and externally driven, and to occur in a relatively time-bound period, and usually because the system is not meeting its goals. The solutions that this action research project sought to deliver comprised a practical application of most of the features of episodic change within the framework of Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang's model of system change; that is, the changes were planned, bound by the time within which I had to complete my doctoral program, and undertaken because SGM was not meeting its youth engagement goals. The change, however, was not externally driven because it was initiated and championed by insiders within the organization. The fact that I was not part of either the youth membership or leadership team of SGM meant that I was not in a nucleus or
structurally powerful position, my role as an insider researcher notwithstanding. Episodic changes are transformative in terms degree (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang’s Model of Systems Change.*

Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang’s (2007) model utilizes the soft systems methodologies (SSM) and systems dynamics to focus on interventions. SSM centers on engaging multiple stakeholders to develop multiple pictures of a problem and a desired state (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang’s (2007) model of systems change incorporates ideas from SSM in the following ways:

1. Recognizing the subjective nature of systems analysis.
2. Emphasizing the subjective nature of systems analysis.
3. Emphasizing the importance of examining the political, social and cultural aspects of
a system when identifying relevant system parts.

4. Attending to both the experienced realities of system life and the desired state with the goal of identifying gaps between the two, so levers for needed change can be identified. (p. 200)

Systems dynamic thinking also applies general systems principles to managerial and societal issues by examining the patterns of cause and effect relationships within a system to explain system behavior (Jackson, 2003; Senge, 2006). It provides applicable principles for understanding system structure and characteristics, the role of feedback, implications of delays between actions and consequences, and the root causes of issues, and for discovering significant levers for change. “Systems dynamics also contribute to Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang’s model,” Checkland and Scholes (1990) write, by:

1. Providing tools for structuring thinking about the patterns of the interaction between system elements and the potential implications of those interactions for the system or whole.

2. Emphasizing the importance of identifying root causes when engaged in a systems analysis. (p. 200)

A systems view of change requires a focus on the interactions between system parts and the patterns that emerge from them (Senge, 2006). Senge (2006) also maintains that change initiatives are rooted in the belief that significant change in a system is dependent on the willingness of the surrounding system to make adjustments in order to accommodate the desired goal. The four principal steps involved in this transformative change process are highlighted in Table 1.
Table 1

**Essential Components of Transformative Systems Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bounding the System</th>
<th>Understanding Fundamental System Parts as Potential Root Causes</th>
<th>Assessing System Interactions</th>
<th>Identifying Levers for Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Problem definition</td>
<td>i. System norms</td>
<td>i. Reinforcing and balancing interdependencies</td>
<td>Identifying parts to leverage for change:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Identification of the levels, niches, organizations and actors relevant to the problem</td>
<td>ii. System resources</td>
<td>ii. System feedback and self-regulation</td>
<td>i. Exerts or could exert cross-level influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. System regulations</td>
<td>iii. Interaction delays</td>
<td>ii. Direct Systems behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. System operations</td>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Feasible to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Identifying interactions and patterns to leverage for change:*

i. Systems differences that create niches compatible with systems change goals
ii. Long standing patterns that support or hinder change goal
iii. Gaps in system feedback mechanisms
iv. Cross-level/sector connections that are needed

*Note.* Foster-Fishman et al., 2007. A framework for transformative systems change.

As indicated earlier, the tenets of Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang’s (2007) model of systems change were foundational for this action research project. The first step in the implementation of this model required the change agent to bind the system. All systems are bound, and the boundaries limit our understanding and ability to leverage change (Midgley, 2000). In the context of this study, SGM served as a bound system, of which the youth
department was a subsystem. The boundaries in the project helped to determine the identities and positions of those with the understanding to drive much-needed change. These change drivers were identified as the teachers of the youth and other committed congregants. In the early stages of research, church members who functioned in various capacities with the church worked with some youth teachers to identify and define the problem as was recommended by this model. In subsequent stages, AR team members explored and discussed the underlying reasons for the persistence of the (identified) problem.

Olson and Eoyang (2001) assert that fundamentally shifting the character of a system involves understanding and attending to those parts, or deep structures, that maintain and constrain the system patterns. These structures include attitudes, beliefs, values, expectations, and tacit behaviors that provide the background for what is called the status quo, and explain why and how the system and its members operate in the way that they do (Gersick, 1991). The action research team exhaustively explored the deep structures within the SGM system. The AR team found that due to its ethnic nature, SGM was laden with cultural nuances which drove many of the interactions and which needed to be properly understood for change to be effective and sustainable.

To further support the utilization of theories and interventions in this project, Table 2 presents a list of empirical studies and their key findings. Each highlighted study was pertinent to this action research project. The table is laid out in such a way as to display the theoretical lenses, followed by the interventions.
### Table 2

**Empirical Studies Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnette, 2010</td>
<td>To examine the strategies employed by program administrators in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) as they negotiate sociopolitical interests in developing programs using the Cervero and Wilson (2006) framework for program planning.</td>
<td>Continuing higher education administrators negotiate power and influence within HBCUs by networking among peers and colleagues, finding common interests, and creating parallel structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westfall-Rudd, 2011</td>
<td>To examine and document teacher participation in continuing professional education planning based on Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) adult planning theory.</td>
<td>When the teachers took primary responsibility for planning their own professional development, they seemed to assume an increased sense of ownership for practice of their profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendricks, 2001</td>
<td>To study the relationship between contextual factors, individual factors, and the use of influencing tactics in adult education planning situations. The study tested the theoretical relationships between variables that have been suggested by Cervero and Wilson (1994a).</td>
<td>Low levels of conflict, indicative of consensus, were associated with reasoning and consulting. This finding was consistent with the theoretical position of Cervero and Wilson (1994a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. J. Watkins, &amp; Tisdell, 2006</td>
<td>To examine how adult degree program administrators negotiate power and interest by: moving the institutional interest in adult learners from the margins closer to the center; gaining influence by drawing on multiple forms of capital; building a bridge of common interests among key players as a way of leveraging power; and balancing institutional expectations for growth with resource allocation.</td>
<td>Adult degree program planners negotiate power and interest by: moving the institutional interest in adult learners from the margins closer to the center; gaining influence by drawing on multiple forms of capital; building a bridge of common interests among key players as a way of leveraging power; and balancing institutional expectations for growth with resource allocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senger, 2002</td>
<td>To assess how interest-based negotiation, as popularized by Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991), works in different cultural contexts around the world.</td>
<td>Interest-based negotiation is extremely valuable in many cases and less relevant in others. Overall, it is a useful framework for analyzing negotiation and provides helpful tools for approaching most situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Booth &amp; McCredie, 2004</td>
<td>To examine Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida’s (BCBSF’s) attempt to indoctrinate Fisher and Ury’s (1991) principles of interest-based negotiation throughout the entire organization, after one BCBSF’s alliance group began to experience positive outcomes by applying the concepts.</td>
<td>The company’s general experience was that concepts came more naturally at the executive/strategic level and required more deliberation at subsequent levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford, 2007</td>
<td>Action research case study that describes a transformational change effort to make a police department into a learning organization by becoming a community policing organization. The purpose of the change effort was build capacity to sustain change efforts and instill system thinking into the mindset of members of the organization.</td>
<td>Effective leaders must have the patience to constantly build capacity for change among organizational members throughout the various stages of the change effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suarez-Balcazar, Redmond, Koub, Hellwig, Davis, Martinez, &amp; Jones, 2007</td>
<td>Illustrates efforts toward systems change in the luncheon program and food vending machines in the Chicago public schools using the social ecological model and the soft systems methodology.</td>
<td>Critical antecedents that lead to change and challenges to change effort were identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metzger, Crean, &amp; Forbes-Jones, 2009</td>
<td>To examine associations between patterns of early adolescent participation in organized activity and academic achievement, problem behaviors, and adult support.</td>
<td>The uninvolved group of adolescents had the lowest grade point average, more negative effect and lower levels of support from adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvin, Farmer, Leung, Thompson &amp; Hutchins, 2010</td>
<td>To examine the effect of participation in school, community and church based activities on academic achievement among low income African American middle school students.</td>
<td>Participation in school and church activities showed a positive relationship with achievement and interpersonal competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toldson &amp; Anderson, 2010</td>
<td>To explore the relationship between religious activities and factors associated with academic success among Black students in the eighth and tenth grades.</td>
<td>All students who participated in more religious activities and who had stronger religious convictions were more likely to report higher grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mueller, Bensyl, Vesely, Oman, &amp; Aspy, 2010</td>
<td>To determine whether attendance in religious services or involvement in church/religious activities among youth (13-19 years) is more strongly associated with engagement in sexual activity.</td>
<td>Involvement in church/religious activities and not the attendance of religious services had the strongest association for “never having sexual intercourse” among both male and female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdette &amp; Hill, 2009</td>
<td>To test whether church attendance, religious salience, private religiosity, and family religiosity delay transitions into sexual touching, oral sex, and sexual intercourse.</td>
<td>Religious salience had a particularly strong association with delayed adolescent sexual behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, 2008</td>
<td>To investigate whether intense religiosity among adolescents leads to greater civic engagement.</td>
<td>Intense religiosity is a significant determinant of community volunteering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brady &amp; Hapenny, 2010</td>
<td>To investigate a proposed relationship between generativity and religiosity in early adulthood</td>
<td>Support was found for associations between prayers, religious and spiritual identification and generative concern/behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren et al., 2009</td>
<td>To assess the effect of faith-based community partnerships in two health promotion projects designed to target obesity by addressing poor eating habits and lack of physical activity among African American youth and adults.</td>
<td>Project resulted in substantial physical changes in the community that encouraged improvements in nutrition and physical activity habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kegler, Hall, &amp; Kiser, 2010</td>
<td>To explore potential contributions of partnerships between faith-based organizations and public health to eliminate health disparities and to assess the factors that facilitate or inhibit such partnerships.</td>
<td>Study revealed barriers such as limited resources, competition/turf protection, racism, internal team conflict, fear, distrust, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter, 2001</td>
<td>To examine if participation in youth clubs promotes continued involvement in the church.</td>
<td>Most important predictors of continued involvement in the church were commitments to the social and Christian activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chang-Ho &amp; Tameifuna, 2011</td>
<td>To examine the link between the existence of paid youth pastors and the attitude of the church’s youth toward the denomination.</td>
<td>Youth pastors appear to contribute to the development and maintenance of quality programs, increase the frequency of youth programs, accomplish interesting and thought-provoking program ministry, and enhance youth leadership in church services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widstrom, 2011</td>
<td>To provide youth ministers with an awareness of their culture that might lead to greater effectiveness.</td>
<td>A common culture that was biblical, intentional, redemptive, developmental, adaptable, relational, professional, and supernatural was revealed among youth pastors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

The preceding review of literature indicates that the theories undergirding this study have been explored and tested extensively in some contexts. However, the review also shows that the theories have been understudied within faith-based organizations. Moreover, it is evident that exploration of these theories within even specialized niches, such as that of an ethnic minority, is also lacking. The application of program planning, negotiation, and systems theories provided the AR team with ample opportunities to gain a more practical understanding of the interconnectivity of the concepts as we navigated the youth engagement problem within an ethnic faith-based organization. As different constructs and tools from these theories were applied to the study, AR team members became better equipped to diagnose, understand, and influence SGM to help engage its youth more effectively.

The theories that informed this study favor collaboration, democratization, and interdependency. These align with action research, the core methodology for this project. The following section describes AR and how it was specifically applied within SGM to result in program planning for youth engagement.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this case study was action research (AR). This chapter describes AR and its use in the execution of the project at Salvation Global Ministries. Information about the method of data collection and analysis, data sources, trustworthiness, resolution of ethical issues, steps taken to limit the incidence and margin of error, and case study research are discussed. To ensure their credibility in the project, the participants and tools used to collect data are also described. The chapter then highlights the limitations of the methodology as well as how they were addressed. Lastly, my subjectivity as the researcher is addressed.

The purpose of this research was to investigate program planning dynamics in a faith-based organization that leads to youth engagement. Four questions guided the research:

1. What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization?
2. How are these challenges negotiated during the program planning process?
3. What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in increased youth engagement?
4. What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth?

An action research case study methodology was employed to answer these questions.
Action Research Methodology

Reason and Bradbury (2008) explain that action research “is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing, in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in the participatory worldview” (p. 1). Herr and Anderson (2005) add that AR is “an inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (p. 3). Action research typically involves:

1. Constructing: identifying the issue(s) to be researched, defining the context(s), seeking approval to conduct the project, and putting together a research team.

2. Planning Action: working with team members to determine the best course of action. This may involve actual and/or virtual meetings, review of literature on the issue(s) in question. It deals with the “What?”, “How?” and “When?” of the action(s) to be taken.

3. Taking Action: executing the action(s) agreed upon by the research team.

4. Action Evaluation: includes receiving feedback about the implemented action(s), to determine its success, or if/where adjustments need to be made to foster a better outcome. (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010)

The four steps above constituted the frame within which this study’s action research methodology was performed.

The action research team consisted of youth teachers within SGM and other concerned adults who worked to plan, implement, and evaluate youth development programs. Although there were eventually 10 core AR team members, AR meetings were open to all church members. Several attended periodically to provide input. Telecommunication tools such as
emails, SMS\(^1\), and WhatsApp\(^2\) were used to update team members who had missed meetings. Some congregants also made themselves available whenever the AR team needed assistance. The fluid nature of the entire team and its meetings added a degree of complexity to the entire process, which is consistent with Caffarella’s (2002) assertion that as more individuals are involved in planning, the process tends to be less logical.

AR meetings were held on the SGM premises. Many were held on Sundays between 10 and 11 a.m. This scheduling took into account that the first church service took place from 9 to 10 a.m., and the second service lasted from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thus, the AR meetings were accessible to all church members regardless of the service they chose to attend. The one-hour slot during which Sunday school took place was deemed the most appropriate time to meet because SGM members who were interested in attending AR meetings would not be required to make an additional trip to the church. The congregants who chose to attend AR meetings had earlier agreed that the Sunday school period was the best time for meetings. Congregants who attended Sunday school had not indicated any interest in working on the project. Additionally, AR meetings were not held every Sunday during the project. Thus, people who attended the AR meetings only sacrificed a few Sunday school sessions to help the church through this initiative. Furthermore, since the action research project was time-bound, the skipping of Sunday school to attend the AR meetings was a temporary arrangement. Therefore, the project did not permanently disrupt the church's schedule.

During the constructing and planning phases of the project, meetings were held at least twice a month for the three-month duration. As the project progressed to the implementation and

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\(^1\) Short Messaging Service.
\(^2\) A cross-platform mobile messaging application.
evaluation stages, meetings were scheduled both pre- and post-intervention. During the pre-intervention meeting, logistics were discussed, and roles were assigned to AR team members. Several pre-intervention meetings were held depending on the nature of the needed intervention. Post-intervention, another meeting was held to evaluate the results of the intervention.

**Research Design**

The action research cycle involved construction, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. This project considered the different activities at each stage of the AR cycle. Due to the many interventions in this project, planning, taking action, and evaluating action occurred concurrently in some cases; as one program was being evaluated, another was being planned and another undergoing implementation. Sometimes, all three activities took place during the same meeting session. For ease of understanding, in this narrative the activities will be delineated into each phase.

Data were collected via meeting notes, brainstorming session, youth participant data, interviews, and participant observations. Figure 3 provides a visual depiction of the research design and Table 3 shows the research questions (RQ), data collected, and data analysis.

![Figure 3. Overview of Research Design.](image-url)
Table 3

*Research Questions, Data Collected, and Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions (RQ)</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization?</td>
<td>i. Reflective Interviews</td>
<td>i. Descriptive Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Critical Incident Interviews</td>
<td>ii. Thematic Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Field Notes</td>
<td>iii. Recursive Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. AR Meeting</td>
<td>iv. Constant comparative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are challenges negotiated and addressed during the program planning process?</td>
<td>i. Critical Incident Interviews</td>
<td>i. Descriptive Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. AR Meeting Notes</td>
<td>ii. Thematic Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Field Notes</td>
<td>iii. Recursive Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. AR Meeting Notes</td>
<td>iv. Constant comparative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth?</td>
<td>i. Critical Incident Interviews</td>
<td>i. Descriptive Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Field Notes</td>
<td>ii. Thematic Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Meeting Notes</td>
<td>iii. Recursive Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What learning occurs at the individual, group and system level as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth?</td>
<td>i. Reflective Interviews</td>
<td>i. Descriptive Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Critical Incident Interviews</td>
<td>ii. Thematic Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Meeting Notes</td>
<td>iii. Meta-Analysis of the action research process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case Study**

A case study refers to the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995, p. xi). As a research method, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2014). Stake (1995) further asserts that a case study should focus on understanding the particular case and maximizing what can be learned, what it is, and what it does.

“Case study research is usually the preferred method when (a) the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions, (b) a researcher has little or no control over behavioral
events, and (c) the focus of a study is a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014, p. 2).” The case study methodology was appropriate for this study because it allowed the AR team to develop a deeper understanding of SGM, thereby creating knowledge that was crucial to generating change in other parts of the system.

According to Stake (1995), case studies are strategic inquiries in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information over the set time period. Scholars often use the case study approach with action research methodology. For example Reid, Kneafsey, Long, Hulme, and Wright (2007) successfully utilized the case study method to study the actions of a team of researchers commissioned to evaluate an 18-month pilot program involving assessment and rehabilitation service for older adults with complex needs. The aim of the pilot program was to maximize older adults’ ability to live independently. Also, Reggy-Mamo (2008) employed the case study method to describe the use of experiential learning in a classroom after receiving several complaints and concerns from previous students as well as from course evaluations indicating that there was too much lecturing being conducted throughout the semester and not enough hands-on experience. This report is a single case study; the events described here occurred over a two-year period and are continuing at the present time.

**Study Participants**

Because attendance was open to all congregants who had expressed an interest in program planning for the youth, AR meetings were fluid. Consequently, several individuals attended the scheduled meetings sporadically. However, for the purposes of the action research project, AR team members have been defined as congregants who signed the informed consent
form, attended meetings regularly, and whose participation was crucial to different phases of the project.

The action research team consisted of six men and four women (excluding myself) who got involved because they were concerned about issues of youth development. Some of the team members were actual youth teachers while others were congregants passionate about youth-oriented issues. The group was diverse in terms of age, length of stay in the U.S., length of church membership, and whether or not they had children. For the purposes of documenting this study, AR team members were asked to self-select pseudonyms. Only half of the participants responded to the request; therefore, I assigned random biblical names to represent the remaining team members. Table 4 provides a demographic breakdown of AR team members.
Table 4

*Action Research Team Profile*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant*</th>
<th>Age (in Years)</th>
<th>Length of Stay in the United States</th>
<th>Length of SGM Church Membership</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>&lt; 6 years</td>
<td>&lt; 6 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>&lt; 10 years</td>
<td>&lt; 10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>&lt; 10 years</td>
<td>&lt; 10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Less than 35</td>
<td>&gt; 20 years</td>
<td>&lt; 5 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Less than 35</td>
<td>&gt; 15 years</td>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>Less than 35</td>
<td>&lt; 7 years</td>
<td>&lt; 7 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Less than 35</td>
<td>&gt; 20 years</td>
<td>&lt; 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>&gt; 20 years</td>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>&gt; 20 years</td>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All participant names are pseudonymous

**Data Collection**

For this project, data were collected via multiple sources. These included brainstorming sessions, surveys, meeting notes, observations, reflective journaling, interviews, and church documents. Different collection methods were used with different groups of individuals, all of whom had given their informed consent. A sample of the informed consent form can be found in Appendix A. The reasons behind the decision to collate information from different sources are detailed here.
**Brainstorming**

Kicking off the pre-planning phase of the project, a brainstorming session was conducted to develop a needs assessment survey. Participants were asked to identify the areas in the church which stood to benefit from the action research project. The participants were purposefully selected congregants who were long-term members of the church or leaders of various groups. During the session, a flip chart was used for taking notes as members communicated their suggestions orally. The flip chart was visible to everyone. Twelve areas of concern were identified and ultimately included as the items on the needs assessment survey (see Appendix B).

**Surveys**

Surveys provide a quantitative description of opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2009). The efforts of the aforementioned brainstorming session yielded the needs assessment survey, which contained demographic questions as well as the 12 areas of need identified during the brainstorming session. The survey was piloted with 12 members of the church before it was administered to the rest of the congregation. Of the 148 congregants who received the survey, 102 completed and returned theirs.

The creation and use of this survey in addition to the already existing results of the initial brainstorming session served a dual purpose. First, the needs assessment survey met the participatory requirement of action research because it gave congregants an opportunity to contribute to the AR focus. It was also an avenue to formally introduce both the concept of AR and the research project to the church. Second, the survey allowed for relationship building at the beginning of the process and offered church members an opportunity to provide input in the identification of an existing problem, thereby giving them a sense of ownership of the project.
(Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). This was especially important because some of the church members were later solicited to become part of the AR team.

**Meetings**

Due to the collaborative nature of AR, several meetings were held for the duration of the project. During the planning phase, at least two meetings were held each month. Meetings were also held before each youth event to work out logistics and after the event to reflect on and evaluate the program. At least one youth event was scheduled each month for nine months of the year. Many decisions were made during these meetings which affected the outcome of the project; therefore, it was pertinent that this information was captured.

At the beginning of the planning phase, the AR team attempted to record proceedings and transcribe them afterward to ensure accuracy; however, since not everybody in the meetings consented to research, this plan was nullified. The congregants who refused to sign the research consent forms were not considered as part of the AR team but were allowed to attend meetings when they chose. No formal interviews were conducted with these congregants, and their presence posed a challenge to recording AR meetings because of the need to comply with their desire for privacy. As an alternative, notes were taken during meetings and summaries made to capture highlights and decisions.

**Observations**

“Qualitative observations are those in which the researcher takes field notes to record the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site” (Roulston, 2010, p. 181). My insider researcher role provided many opportunities for observation. At the commencement of the project, I was already a committed member of SGM and had attended Sunday services for a decade. I had interacted with congregants from whom AR team members for this project were
eventually selected. I had also been aware of the various departments of the church but had not
fully utilized them because there had been no reason to do so.

By embarking on this project, it became expedient to show even more interest in the
happenings at SGM. I began to keep abreast of the various programs, and made regular visits to
the children’s department to observe the dynamics and interactions of the teenagers who were
taught there. As youth programs were implemented, the proceedings were painstakingly
observed to gather any additional data which could be relevant to the project. In addition, church
occurrences, including all that typically went on with operations and programming were
carefully noted.

**Reflective Journaling**

Throughout the research period, I kept a journal of experiences. I sometimes carried a
hardcopy of the journal around, and at other times spoke into the recorder on my phone. By the
end of the project, all electronic journaling had been transcribed and all information
consolidated.

The journal provided an outlet for me to express feelings at different points of the study.
It was also used to record thoughts about the reasoning behind certain experiences. Indeed, it
was interesting to see how the contents of the journal changed with different phases of the
project. The journal provided information which enabled me to see how the relationship
between the AR team and key members of SGM evolved as the project progressed.

**Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing refers to a situation in which an interviewer generates verbal
communication with an interviewee or interviewees for the purposes of eliciting spoken rather
than written data to examine research problems (Roulston, 2010). Three different rounds of
one-to-one interviews were conducted during the course of the project. The first was in response to requests from some invitees of the initial brainstorming session who preferred to be interviewed in lieu of attending the session. The individual interviews were conducted as requested because of a concern that some people were uncomfortable with verbalizing their true opinions in a group setting. Therefore, their individual opinions were sought privately, and the findings were later brought to the group for discussion and further action. These interviews were semi-structured (i.e., informal and not involving protocols) and enabled respondents to provide input on the items on the needs assessment survey. In this set of interviews, some congregants were simply asked for their thoughts about areas within the church that needed improvement or ongoing issues that needed resolution.

The second round of interviews became necessary because during the implementation phase the team members seemed exhausted as evidenced by a 70% drop in meeting attendance. I carried out reflective interviews to obtain the perspective of AR team members on the current challenges the team was facing and ideas on overcoming them. This was resolved by hiring a youth pastor to help facilitate the process and by recruiting more members for the AR team. During the implementation phase, assistance was also sought from church members who were not actually part of the AR team.

The reflective interviews were also necessitated by the concern that some AR members were not very vocal during the meetings; they hardly spoke at meetings and became even quieter as time went on. This was especially problematic for two reasons:

1. The non-participation of AR team members could potentially interfere with the integrity of the entire project.
2. There was an upcoming debriefing meeting with the pastor at which an update on the status of the project was to be provided.

To address these issues, individual interviews were conducted with the members of the AR team using an interview protocol (see Appendix C). Of the eight who had given their informed consent to become part of the AR team at that time, four were interviewed by phone, two were interviewed in person, and one emailed her question responses. The eighth AR team member was unavailable to be interviewed due to a medical emergency. The responses from the six respondents interviewed in person or by phone were audio-recorded and transcribed. The seven interviews were conducted between May and August 2014.

Most systems, including some automated ones, require the dynamics of human input to function properly. As a system, SGM requires people in order to work. This AR project not only required human input but was also carried out by a team of individuals whose thoughts on the entire project as well as its results were collated through critical incident exit interviews.

Critical incident interviewing is a unique system of interviewing that requires participants to recall a prior incident and provide information about it, the actions and behaviors of those involved, and its outcome (Kemppainen, 2000). “The aim of critical incident interviews is to capture a detailed description of the behaviors of participants in a specific situation, rather than generalizations or opinions” (Victoroff & Hogan, 2006, p. 125). The technique was useful to this study in helping to fully understanding the experiences of various participants in this project.

To formally conclude the AR project, critical incident exit interviews were conducted to enable AR team members to reflect on their experiences. The critical incident exit interview protocol (see Appendix D) was designed to gather information needed to answer the original research questions. These interviews were conducted in January 2015. Seven interviews were
conducted, one over the phone and the other six in person. Three AR team members were unavailable for this final round of interviews. Two members, James and Moses, had relocated to other states while David was unavailable due to medical reasons. These individuals had gradually disengaged from the team, but their inputs were obtained during the first round of reflective interviews. All AR team members were interviewed either during the first or second round. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the interviews in which various participants took part.

Table 5

Study Participants and Interview Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflective Interviews</th>
<th>Critical Incident Exit Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Church Documents

Several church documents were reviewed as a part of this project. Attendance records, the number of SGM parishes, rate of growth, and other pieces of information relevant to the background of SGM were obtained from church documents. Furthermore, as part of the events planning by the newly hired youth pastor for the upcoming year, youth and parents were surveyed to assess their perception of some of the activities of the previous year (i.e., the AR project period). Two separate surveys (i.e., a youth assessment and a parent assessment) were used to obtain data from youth and their parents. IRB permission was not sought for these surveys as they were spearheaded by the youth pastor. Data collected from the youth assessment survey were used to evaluate the results of the program planning efforts of this project.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, data collected for this research study were classified as either qualitative or quantitative. Data analyzed numerically were considered to be quantitative, whereas data analyzed with words were considered qualitative. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Analysis of data from the 12 questions of the needs assessment survey was facilitated by the use of a computer spreadsheet. The survey questions were entered into columns, with participant responses in corresponding rows. A Likert scale was used to allow respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with survey items on a numerical scale. The number “5” was used to indicate a response with which a participant strongly agreed and “1” for strong disagreement; “3” indicated a neutral response. The first 12 of the 20 items on the needs assessment survey were Likert-type.
The 13th survey question was open-ended, and the results were content analyzed. The remaining seven questions related to demographics. Average scores for each item were calculated and ranked to determine their level of importance to SGM members. Survey results are tabulated in Appendix F, along with an explanation of the color coding that was used. Quantitative data were analyzed using a calculator to compute percentages.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The reflection interviews and the critical incidents exit interviews, which constituted the qualitative data, were analyzed using HyperResearch, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Transcribed data were imported into this software for analysis. The primary method of qualitative data analysis was data coding. Basit (2003) maintains that coding is a crucial aspect of analysis. Coding enables a researcher to group similarly coded data into categories or families because they share common characteristics (Saldana, 2013).

Different pieces of data collected from various sources for this research study were coded and categorized to generate themes. “A code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). Data coding is an interpretive act that assigns a word or phrase to a portion of data to summarize or capture its essence (Saldana, 2013). After coding, classification reasoning and intuitive senses are used to categorize data by what looks and feels alike (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), a category is a word or phrase that describes some explicit segment of data, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence that describes more subtle and tacit processes. As categories were determined from coded data, themes began to emerge. “A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization or analytic reflection” (Saldana, 2013, p. 14). At minimum a theme describes and organizes possible
observations, or at maximum it interprets aspects of the phenomenon. A theme may be either directly observable or underlie the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998).

**Data coding and evolution of themes.** HyperResearch software was used to code qualitative data for this project. The first-cycle coding utilized a combination of descriptive and *in-vivo* codes. Codes that provided an overview of selected data were assigned. The initial codes were phrases that described the content of the “chunks” of data. In some cases, phrases or quotes used by the interviewee were assigned codes. Subsequently, second-cycle coding streamlined the codes. At this stage, the same code was used for similar portions of the text in all cases, thus reducing redundancies among codes. Furthermore, the need to group similar codes became apparent in order to develop categories that were geared toward answering research questions. Themes which began to emerge became the basis for the project’s findings. The following is a sample of the final coding scheme:

**Learning Experience:**
- Yielding to strengths
- Attentiveness to commitment
- Weed out dead weight
- Change takes time
- Planning ahead

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues arise at all stages of a research project (Creswell, 2009). As a scholar-practitioner, I recognized the need to anticipate such issues and be prepared to address them. In identifying the research problem, personal preferences were set aside to focus on an issue that was of great importance to the church. This was important for the authenticity of the case study
as the chosen subject was beneficial to the entire SGM membership, not just myself. Furthermore, a concerted effort was made to clarify the research purpose to all participants. No attempts were made to deceive participants about the purpose or the content of the project, and none of the participants was coerced. Participants also indicated that they clearly understood the expectations for their participation which had been communicated to them before they gave informed consent.

In the data collection and analysis phases, all potential ethical issues were addressed accordingly. First, the voluntary nature of survey participants’ involvement was expressly communicated. Church members were encouraged to respond to the survey questions, but they were not pressured in any way (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Then their anonymity was guaranteed. Confidentiality was assured by releasing results in a manner that ensured they could not be traced to individual respondents during data analysis and interpretation activities. Pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' actual names.

The identities of individuals who had been a part of the action research project were also protected during the coding and reporting processes. Recorded data were initially stored on a password-protected phone; the data were subsequently exported to a Dropbox account shared with the transcriber. The transcriber, who had signed a confidentiality agreement, transcribed the data and emailed the transcription to me. The data were then stored on a password-protected computer for analysis.

Data were discarded in such a way as to ensure that they did not fall into the hands of unscrupulous parties. Files were deleted from the phone and computer and paper copies were shredded. During the interpretation of data, participants were debriefed to ascertain an accurate
account of the information collected. The interpretation of data occurred after coding and analysis.

The final written report is as objective as possible. The report avoided language that would inspire bias against anyone who had been involved in the research project regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, race, disability or age. Finally, the report was whole and accurate in that it did not suppressing, falsify, or invent any findings.

**Trustworthiness**

According to Gibbs (2007), qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Creswell and Miller (2000) assert that validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings of a research study are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account. Creswell (2009) further recommends eight strategies (i.e., triangulation, member checking, thick description of findings, clarifying researcher bias, presenting negative information, spending prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing, and engaging an external auditor) for gauging the accuracy of findings. Some of these strategies were used in this study, including triangulation, member checking, thick description of findings, clarifying researcher bias, presenting negative information, spending prolonged time in the field, and peer debriefing. “The convergence of data collected from different sources to determine the consistency of a finding, is known as triangulation” (Yin, 2014, p. 241). Data collected from different participants and sources were triangulated to build themes. As data were collected and analyzed, emerging themes were also checked with participants to assess accuracy. Member checking was carried out during the interviews. Clarification was sought from interviewees during and after the interview session about the understanding of their assertions. Interview data
were also triangulated among interviewees by asking subsequent respondents if they agreed with major assertions from a prior interviewee. In addition, major themes emerging from data analysis were presented to the team for discussion during meetings.

The emerging themes included internal and external challenges to program planning, individual, group, and system learning, group discussion, adaptability, flexibility, and creativity among planners. The themes assessed by checking them across interview participants to determine commonalities have been explored in Chapter 5. In some cases, themes drawn from earlier interviews were tested with participants from subsequent interviews in order to determine the level of agreement. During one of the AR meetings, emerging themes from previously collected data were shared with the group to gather feedback about data trends.

This report contains a detailed description of the research setting in order to give the reader a sense of some of the research experiences. A researcher’s subjectivity section discussing my bias has also been included; it gives the reader additional information about my background, gender, culture, and history, as well as how these might have shaped the interpretation of the collated data. Before the commencement of the project, I had been within the context of SGM for a considerable amount of time (i.e., 10 years). The insider role equipped me with an in-depth understanding of the context and lent credibility to the case study account.

Qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs 2007). “The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2014, p. 49). In this study, reliability was assured by checking transcripts of recorded data, meeting notes, and recorded observations for accuracy. Codes were clearly defined, and data were compared closely with the assigned codes. The
strategies highlighted above were undertaken to ensure validity and trustworthiness. The sponsor organization has made itself available for checking the research process.

**Study Limitations**

This methodology was not without limitations. First, the significant amount of time required to adequately effect change increased the likelihood of turnover within the action research team. In this case, of the 10 members who participated, only five were consistently part of the team from initiation to completion. The other five either began but did not finish or vice versa. Various stages of the study may have been different and yielded different outcomes if all participants were available for the entire project. Second, because the action research study involved several interventions, interviewees indicated that they had forgotten some of the logistics and issues associated with earlier interventions by the time the critical incident exit interviews were conducted. Third, many interviewees were leery of saying negative things about the church because of the religious nature of the institution. Some expressly stated that they were being careful about what they said because they didn’t want the information to get back to some quarters. Fourth, due to my dual role of researcher and participant, some responses to certain interview questions did not provide enough depth. This was because interviewees thought they were redundant and believed I already knew the answers since I was an integral part of the process. Interviewees repeatedly stated, “You know how we did it” or “You were there.” If an outsider had conducted the critical exit interviews, the participants may have been more descriptive in their responses.

**Researcher's Subjectivity**

I am a first-generation Nigerian immigrant living in the United States. I immigrated to the U.S. 11 years ago after spending the first 25 years of my life in Nigeria. I have three siblings,
and we were raised in a two-parent home. The social environment outside our upper middle-class natal home reinforced the moral teachings in the household. Ours was a very religious society where morals were of utmost importance and children were accountable to all adults in the community. It was a literal depiction of “It takes a village to raise a child.”

Now an adult, I joined Salvation Global Ministries because I found it to be a place of worship where the religious doctrine aligned with my personal understanding of the word of God. My husband and three children (who are six, eight, and 10 years old) attend SGM with me. When I began this project with the AR team members, I found that the youth were distracted and disengaged and that the church struggled to instill sound spiritual and moral values in their lives. I was disheartened by this because I believe that spiritual and moral guidance are core responsibilities of a church. I was especially concerned because information gathered in the project’s early stages from youth teachers and other concerned adults showed that many of the youth were not adequately prepared for the pressures of college and adult life.

This fueled my passion for this work as I saw its potential to literally change life outcomes and destinies. It is also my motivation to continue contributing to the sustainability of the cause, despite the official completion of the action research project. I believe that the youth ministry created by this project will eventually raise a generation of future leaders in SGM.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY REPORT

The birthing process is synonymous with creation. It involves bringing to life something that did not formerly exist. The action research project conducted at SGM led to the creation of a youth ministry and corresponding youth engagement programs; as such, the various stages of the birthing process are analogous to the phases of this project as they unfolded in SGM. The preconception, gestation, labor and delivery, and postpartum stages are comparable to the construction, planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of AR. Indeed, the AR project at SGM led to the birth of something new that requires nurturing for growth and sustainability.

This chapter comprises a case study narrative about an action research project conducted in a faith-based organization. The story of this case begins with a description of the context in which the project was executed. It is followed by a breakdown of the action research participants. Lastly, the chapter describes the problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of the research, including the action research activities involved in each phase.

Context: An Immigrant Faith-Based Organization

This action research case project was conducted within a southeastern U.S. metropolitan faith-based organization. For the purpose of this study, the faith-based organization has been given the pseudonym Salvation Global Ministries (SGM). One of the SGM headquarters’ goals is to create a campus within five minutes from every home worldwide (Adeboye, 2007), and numerous campuses have been established across the globe. According to the SGM North
America website, there are 702 campuses in the U.S. and Canada, and as of July 2011 there were over 23,000 campuses worldwide. Due to SGM’s expansion plans, these numbers have continued to rise.

As a Bible-believing church, SGM’s vision is to spread the word of God globally using a teaching and missionary approach that emphasizes proper conduct and moral behavior. The failure of the Nigerian government to meet the infrastructural and social needs of its populace has increased the relevance of SGM to Nigerian society, especially as SGM engages in the provision of social services. All over Nigeria, the church has established schools (primary, secondary, and university), healthcare centers (to improve women’s and children’s health), hospitals, and orphanages, and run campaigns against HIV/AIDS (Adeboye, 2007).

The SGM campus that is the focus of this project was established in 1996 to serve as a spiritual, cultural, and social haven for its members. The campus’s vision is “to strengthen marriages and families, encourage Christian fellowship by evangelizing to the lost, and to minister to the needy with God-given resources” (RCCG Family Praise Chapel, n.d.). This is consonant with Yang’s (2011) assertion that immigrants often come from countries with a strong cultural emphasis on family and community life.

Members of SGM typically travel long distances—with some making a 70-mile round trip—in order to attend church services and share fellowship with other Nigerians. The commitment of the congregation to the church is consistent with findings of a study conducted by Akresh (2011) investigating the religious behaviors and participation patterns among immigrants from various origin groups. The results from the study indicated that Africans with a history of religious practice in their home countries had a tendency for greater religious participation, with increased time in the U.S.
As indicated earlier, 90% of the adult congregants are first-generation Nigerian immigrants. Therefore, members generally view the church as a place where Nigerian spiritual values and cultural heritage can be passed onto the next generation. However, this was observed not to be the case at SGM. Ongoing concerns shared with the pastor by members about youth delinquency created a sense of urgency among the congregants to focus this project on youth engagement. For this reason, this AR project focused on the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement activities within SGM.

**Predominant Culture**

SGM is ethnocentric in nature. The many Nigerian members take great pride in the ability of the Nigerian culture to produce high-achieving professionals on a global scale. Therefore, Nigerian culture is promoted and celebrated among congregants. The culture is characterized by respect based on age, not social status, and great value is also placed on education (the minimum expectation is a Bachelor’s degree), spirituality, and assertiveness.

The assertive orientation of the Nigerian culture was demonstrated in the manner in which congregants quickly expressed discontent with certain decisions made by the SGM pastor. For instance, in order to make the church more appealing to non-Nigerians, he recommended that members stop speaking vernacular or singing in their native language during church sessions. In an effort to enforce this, he announced that he would impose a $5 fine on anyone who spoke in the native language, but members disagreed, and some actually left the church due to this injunction.

Key cultural symbols in the church include the predominant spoken language (Yoruba), types of music played, and dishes served during social events in the church. Members are encouraged to speak their first language, wear flamboyant Nigerian attire, and entertain with
Nigerian menu items and music. The members also expect the church to preserve Nigerian cultural norms, even within the context of American society.

**Organizational Structure**

The current president of SGM Worldwide promotes professionalism among campus leadership. Campus pastors (especially at small campuses) are typically expected to hold other jobs to prevent dependence on the church for livelihood. However, as the church grows and the responsibilities of the pastor increase, he or she may become employed with the church on a full-time basis.

In the SGM church where this action research was carried out, there were approximately 300 congregants, and the pastor was the only full-time employee on the church’s leadership team. The three assistant pastors and 12 deacons who constituted the remainder of the leadership team all held full-time employment in other organizations. Therefore, their participation in church was on a “committed volunteer” basis. Each deacon was assigned a department to oversee. The church departments included ushering, choir, technical, prayer, and protocol. Church members were encouraged to serve in various departments and were known as church workers. Each department was led by a departmental head who reported to the deacon overseeing that department.

**Action Research Participants**

All AR team members for this project were congregants of SGM. The democratic nature of SGM permitted members to attend AR meetings at their will, but not all attendees were considered AR team members, due to the refusal of some to sign the consent form. For the purpose of this case study, AR team members have been defined as those congregants who
formally agreed to participate in the study by signing the informed consent form, attended meetings regularly, and whose participation was crucial to different phases of the project.

The recruitment process involved inviting all congregants who had indicated an interest in working with others to plan, implement, and evaluate youth engagement activities. This was done by making announcements during church services, providing information in the church bulletin, and posting fliers about the research project on noticeboards on the church premises. In addition to these general invitations, I received names of, and was asked to personally invite, some congregants who were known for their passion regarding youth issues; the youth teachers and some AR team members provided these names. Some congregants joined the AR team on the invitation of other team members.

The initial goal was to recruit a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 12 individuals. This was to ensure access to a sufficient number of team members to continue with the project in the event that some team members were unable to attend the meetings or stopped participating altogether as time progressed. I did not want the AR process to be halted by the absence or loss of members. I was also cognizant of issues—such as unwillingness to discuss certain topics or concerns about confidentiality—that could arise because of preexisting relationships among some participants (Roulston, 2010). To address these issues, I scheduled individual reflective interviews midway through the project to gather participants’ points of view outside the group setting. Of the 12 individuals initially invited to the AR team, seven signed the IRB use of human subjects’ consent form.

AR team recruitment did not end with the beginning of program planning. I continued to recruit throughout the year, even as new members joined the church and as more people
indicated their interest in the youth engagement work. By the end of the study, 10 individuals had signed the consent form to participate in the research.

**Participant Profiles**

The AR team consisted of six men and four women (excluding myself), all of whom were passionate about youth issues. These individuals functioned in a variety of roles within the church prior to joining the AR team, and some continued to hold key positions within SGM during and after the project. AR team members brought to the AR “planning table” prior knowledge and experience from working on other church projects. Although this knowledge base was of great benefit to the project, there were some conflicts as a result of the different experiences, as evidenced by claims that “This can’t be done,” “That is not feasible,” “We’ve tried it before, and it didn’t work.” In fact, some team members were very negative, a disposition that limited their vision of what the AR team could accomplish. For example, Martha was certain the church could not afford to fund the youth programs. However, contrary to her expectations, the budget was approved without questions.

AR team members were also diverse in terms of marital status, age, length of stay in the U.S, and length of church membership. Members of the AR team are described below. Their names have been replaced with pseudonyms to mask their identities.

**Peter.** Peter is a male, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. He arrived in the U.S. less than six years ago to join his wife. He is a father to two young sons and has been a member of SGM since his arrival in the U.S. He holds a degree in theater arts from a Nigerian university. He has utilized the knowledge gained from his university education to create a drama group as well as a children dance group in SGM. Peter also helps out in the Technical Department to
ensure that microphones, speakers, projectors, and other technological equipment are in order for church services.

**Esther.** Esther is a female, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. She arrived in the U.S. over a decade ago. She received her professional training at a U.S. university. She is married with two young sons who are in elementary school and were christened in SGM. She has attended the church for over ten years. Esther holds a degree in nursing and is a member of the church’s health team. She also volunteers in the Children’s Department, teaching children between the ages of one and three, and occasionally sings in the choir.

**John.** John is a male, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. He arrived in the U.S. less than 10 years ago and states that “he is not fully acculturated because he runs his own business and has very little interaction with Americans.” He is married and has no children. He has been a member of the church since his arrival in the U.S. He is a youth teacher, serves on the church’s food pantry committee, and is one of the designated church bus drivers.

**James.** James is a male, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. He arrived in the U.S. less than 10 years ago. He is married with four daughters and a son. He has been a member of the church for over five years. James was one of the congregants who championed a youth essay competition that was held some years before the AR project began. He also serves on the church magazine committee.

**Mary.** Mary is a female, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. She was brought to the U.S. as a child. She attended high school and several post-secondary institutions in the U.S. She is a post-doctoral fellow and fully acculturated to American society. She is not married and has no children. She has been a member of the church for less than five years. She is a youth
teacher and served as a mentor during a recent attempt to institute a mentoring program in SGM. She also sits on the church magazine committee.

**Martha.** Martha is a female, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. She arrived in the U.S. as a teenager and acquired post-secondary education at a U.S. university. She is one of the founding members of the church. She is not married and has no children. She heads the educational arm of a non-profit organization created by the pastor to offer after-school homework assistance, SAT prep, GED prep, and computer classes to church members and the community. She is also a member of the church’s publicity team.

**Moses.** Moses is a male, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. He arrived in the U.S. less than six years ago and has been a member of the church for less than four years. He is a former president of the church’s Young Adults and Singles Ministry. He is currently divorced and has no children. Moses also championed a previous attempt to initiate a mentoring program within the church.

**David.** David is a male, first-generation Jamaican immigrant. He arrived in the U.S. as a child over 20 years ago. He received all of his formal education in the U.S. He is divorced with three children. He is one of the executives for the Singles Ministry. He is fully acculturated to American society. David has attended SGM for less than five years.

**Joseph.** Joseph is a male, first-generation Nigerian immigrant. He arrived in the U.S. over 20 years ago. He is married with four sons. His oldest child is 14 and has been a beneficiary of the programs implemented by the AR team. Joseph has been a member of the church for over a decade. He is a youth teacher and volunteers in the Technical Department.
**Ruth.** Ruth is a female African American who is married to a first-generation Nigerian immigrant. The oldest of her four sons is a teenager who is very active in SGM. Ruth is the events coordinator for the church and also volunteers in the Ushering and Publicity Departments.

In the course of the project, two members (Moses and David) withdrew for different reasons. Moses relocated to another state, while David experienced a medical emergency that required him to focus on his health. Both participants were interviewed to record their perspectives on the project before they left. A third member (Esther) took a three-month leave of absence to attend to a medical emergency but returned to the team afterward.

The AR team members were responsible for all phases of the project (i.e., planning, implementation, and evaluation). Action research team meetings were conducted on some Sundays from 10 to 11 a.m. in one of the church classrooms. Members were informed in advance of the Sundays on which meetings would be held. During the planning phase, which lasted three months, meetings were held almost every Sunday. During the subsequent implementation phase, meetings were conducted prior to and subsequent to the implementation of interventions. The meetings prior to the implementation of interventions were designed to delegate tasks and discuss logistics for the interventions, while the subsequent meetings provided opportunities to evaluate and reflect on the interventions. Several email communications, text messages, and chat room conversations supplemented the meetings. Many decisions were also made and communicated through those telecommunications fora.

**Case Study Story**

The story of this AR case study unfolded in four phases: construction (pre-planning), planning, implementation, and evaluation. In practice, some of these phases occurred concurrently, but for the purpose of this case study each is discussed separately.
Phase 1: Preconception – Program Construction (Pre-Planning)

In the same manner that there are many ways that prospective parents can enhance their chances of fertility, a safe pregnancy, and a healthy baby, I as the principal researcher of this AR project also engaged in some important activities at the onset that affected the outcome of the work. The construction phase for this project spanned two months. In order to obtain permission to use SGM as the context for conducting this action research study, a meeting was help with the pastor of the church to explain what an action research study was and to request the use of the church to conduct the research. The pastor was very receptive with assurances that the church liked to support its members in any way possible. He communicated that he did not foresee any problems with granting the request.

After I had obtained verbal approval to conduct the research within the church, I made inquiries about pending issues whose resolution would be beneficial to the church. The pastor’s response was, “You do not have to worry about finding an issue to work on, within the church; there are so many unresolved issues.” He made specific reference to the ongoing issue of making the church more appealing to non-Nigerians. His other suggestions included starting a food pantry to serve the needy within and around the church; engaging and protecting youth from negative influences; developing ways to reach out to senior citizens; and possibly creating a vernacular-speaking arm of the church. Before I left that initial meeting, the pastor and I agreed that it would be essential for me to present my request for permission to use the church as the context of my action research at the upcoming Church Leadership Meeting.

The church leadership consisted of the pastor, three assistant pastors, and 12 deacons. They were all present at the Church Leadership Meeting, which took place a week after my initial meeting with the pastor. I was given 15 minutes to make my case. I showed them a
PowerPoint presentation I had created about action research. In my presentation, I also included the timeline in which I believed the project would be completed. After my presentation, one of the deacons expressed concerns about the study becoming an additional and unnecessary burden on the pastor; he believed the pastor already had too many responsibilities. I explained that the action research would actually be a collaborative effort among all willing congregants to resolve issues that affected them. I reiterated that it would not be the pastor’s responsibility to lead the project. I further explained that I would be putting together a research team, that the pastor did not have to be a part of this team, and that I would facilitate the AR team meetings. Lastly, I gave the group an opportunity to provide input on the issues that could serve as the focus of the project.

In general, the feedback I received was similar to what the pastor had initially told me. There was one major exception: One member of the leadership team suggested the project should center on developing succession systems to ensure that the children of congregants would be able to succeed the adults in running the church. I then obtained a letter of approval from the church authorizing me to use SGM for my research study through May 2015. I requested a broad timeframe to allow for flexibility in design and to enable me capture all the phases and cycles of the action research study.

Deciding on a topic for my AR project proved more difficult than I had earlier imagined. There was no agreement among congregants about the areas on which the study should focus; personal conversations and semi-structured interviews with congregants revealed a wide variety of possibilities. Views on the most desirable research topic ranged from motivation of congregants to participate more in church activities, to fashion among the youth, to the spiritual preparation of the youth for the pressures of college life. Other suggestions included working
with a committee/department, such as the Women’s Committee, Ushering Department, or Food Pantry Committee, to help resolve issues specific to those groups. Another individual stated that the church already has too many non-functional committees, so creating a new one would spread people thinner. Initially, this statement caused me to consider researching why some committees were not functioning as well as the possibility of aligning committees within the church.

The great variance in the presented views uncovered a need for me to investigate in depth the issue that was most pertinent to the greatest number of congregants. To uphold the fundamental democratic tenet of AR, I decided to conduct a needs assessment survey. I then put together a committee of vested members to develop this survey instrument.

**Needs Assessment**

Eighteen members of SGM were invited to a brainstorming session to identify areas in need of improvement in the church. Fourteen attended the meeting, three gave their feedback via interviews, and one member was unavailable. The member identified 12 areas of concern, which then formed the items on the needs assessment survey. A two-page survey instrument consisting of 20 items laid out in two sections was developed.

After the development of the survey, I piloted the instrument among 12 church members who sat on various committees. Nine reported that they had no difficulty completing the survey. Three members did not understand what was required of them, so they completed the survey without providing any feedback. In response to a suggestion by the pastor, I included an open-ended question to allow participants to provide input on other areas that were not listed in the survey but that were important to them nevertheless. The pastor also stated that since the list given to the committee was not exhaustive, it was possible that there were some areas that had
not been identified and could be discovered from the responses to open-ended questions. This suggestion was incorporated into the final copy of the survey.

After securing permission from the pastor, I utilized the opportunities of two Thanksgiving Services, held on Sunday, November 3, 2013, to administer the modified survey to the rest of the church. (Church attendance is typically at its peak during Thanksgiving Services.) 148 surveys were distributed. Of this number, 102 surveys were completed and returned. The surveys were handed out in church before the sermon. Congregants were asked to complete and return them when the offering was collected or before they left the church. The timeframe for completing the survey was about an hour. A few congregants returned theirs the following Sunday; however, there were 46 surveys that were not returned. They were left uncompleted on church pews, littering the church. The timeline of events for this phase is listed in Appendix E.

**Needs Assessment Survey Interpretation, Discussion, and Recommendations**

The high response rate (68%) for the survey revealed the willingness of church members to give their opinions on issues concerning them. The responses from both the survey and interviews, which were scheduled for some congregants who were unable to contribute to the brainstorming session, also indicated that many members believed that SGM had several areas of need. Many of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with most of the items on the survey. Their responses validated the work done by members of the needs assessment committee who had worked together to build a foundation for the survey.

The survey results also indicated that congregants had a hard time deciding which items were most crucial, since they agreed with most items. However, after averages were calculated for all responses, results revealed that two of the topmost issues were youth-related. The three needs of greatest perceived urgency are presented below in order of importance:
1. Focusing on adequately preparing the youth for the pressures of college.
2. New member retention.
3. Offering academic support to youth and teenagers, such as tutoring, homework assistance, etc.

Only 14% of the respondents provided feedback to the open-ended question. These responses spanned various areas and did not have a particular theme. Due to the lack of consistency among these responses and the low response rate, these responses were not a major influence on selecting a research focus.

Personally, I found this sequence of results interesting because when I began to survey the adult population, I had not anticipated that youth issues would be the burning issue in congregants’ minds. I had thought that the social issues or acculturation issues would supersede all others. But the fact that adults perceived youth issues as the most pressing, as identified by the survey, provided evidence that it was a valid concern.

The results of the needs assessment survey were presented to the committee that developed the survey and were subsequently shared with all congregants on December 1, 2013. In addition to sharing the project focus with the congregants, I utilized the opportunity to solicit interest and support from members to become part of the actual AR team, which would work on the identified research focus. In discussing the survey results with the needs assessment committee members, the pastor, and deacons, I confirmed that adequate engagement and development of the youth, to enable them to withstand societal pressures, was an ongoing concern. As stated earlier, many parents look to the church to provide a safe place in the perceived “wilderness of the American society.” The church is seen as a place that provides immunity from the perceived social ills of the American way of life (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000).
Phase 2: Gestation – Program Planning

After youth engagement was identified as the focus of the study, the planning phase began. Just as the gestation period encompasses a length of time during which many concerns of the soon to-be parents are raised and addressed, the planning phase of the AR project was also prolonged and involved extensive deliberations on youth ministry and program features. This phase lasted about three months and involved several physical meetings which took place in the church as well as through other channels. The planning phase supported Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) assertion that though a planning table could be a physical one, where planning decisions are made, more often it is metaphorical and accounts for the judgments people make through email or faxes, or in offices, hallways, restrooms, or social gatherings.

I took notes at most meetings because of the presence of some attendees who were not AR team members. On occasions when only AR team members attended, I made audio recordings of these meetings using an application on my iPhone. I made sure to transcribe the recordings, which I then added to my meeting notes. A summary of the planning meetings is presented in Table 6, with key events that occurred during this phase described afterward.
### Summary of Planning Meetings Held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Date</th>
<th>Meeting Agenda</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1, 2013</td>
<td>To inform youth teachers about AR study focus, explain methodology, and solicit their support.</td>
<td>Youth teachers pledged their support, recommended some congregants for AR team membership, and promised to obtain input from youth for AR planning consideration. No subsequent meeting until after Children’s Christmas event on December 20, 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 22, 2013</td>
<td>Meeting of youth teachers and AR team to discuss research dynamics and brainstorm how to tackle research focus.</td>
<td>Plan to schedule meeting with parents to determine mutual needs. At this time we were still awaiting results of youth input to be supplied by youth teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 26, 2014</td>
<td>To examine youth input into engagement planning and determine next steps.</td>
<td>Concern was expressed that youth were more interested in fun activities. There was a disagreement about program offerings and when to begin identifying goals and objectives. There was no resolution on meeting with parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2, 2014</td>
<td>Review goals and objectives; align with program needs.</td>
<td>Created mentoring program; identified activities to correspond with identified goals and objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16, 2014</td>
<td>Review of draft of activities to align with goals and objectives; select tentative dates and make cost estimates.</td>
<td>A schedule of activities to engage youth, to be conducted from March to December, was created.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning Hallmarks

Several issues were raised during the planning phase. These issues impacted the program planning work as well as its execution. Each of these issues is discussed in the following sections.

Communication. At my initial meeting with the youth teachers to discuss youth engagement concerns and the subsequent AR study, it turned out that one of the teachers was blissfully unaware of the needs assessment study that had been conducted. Consequently, everything I said surprised him. In another incident, I tried to share some information I had received from a member of the Children’s Department leadership about a meeting which had been scheduled between the parents of teenagers and youth teachers. Mary, a youth teacher on the AR team, asked, “Which teachers? Nobody ever discussed meeting with parents with me.” These incidents led me to question the strength and reliability (if not the existence) of systems that SGM had in place to ensure that all members were kept abreast of happenings.

Clarity of organizational structure. Throughout the planning phase, I ensured that the deacon overseeing the Children’s Department was my point of contact. However, I was severely accused by one youth teacher of not obtaining clearance for my research study activities. The deacon in charge of the department was very passive and never expressly told me about the youth teacher’s role. All I knew at the time was that he was one of the teachers, but he seemed overly angered by my “interference” with the Youth Department. It turned into a power struggle for him, since he believed I had overstepped my bounds. This teacher was one of the congregants who had expressly refused to sign the informed consent form. I later discovered that the youth teacher in question was overseeing the youth even though they were a part of the Children’s Department.
Another deacon who also taught the youth and happened to be a good friend of the problematic youth teacher was similarly obstructive. On one occasion, he told me, “I’ve been hearing about how you’ve been coming to disturb and interrupt the classes upstairs.” These conflicts brought some confusion to the planning process. Although I attempted to gain a better understanding of the structure of the Children’s Department, of which the youth are a part, I was unable to do so. Despite my attempts, I was also unable to obtain an organizational chart for the church. The church secretary informed me that the pastor was the only one with access to it and that it was being updated. This lack of a definitive structure was problematic to program planning. To work around this issue and minimize conflict, I sent information to people I had reason to believe were close to the issues, while hoping that the right individuals were being informed.

Tardiness. Unfortunately, tardiness emerged as a cultural problem in SGM. The notion that “It is fashionable to be late to events” was prevalent during planning meetings. Many participants were perpetually late, with some being tardy by as much as half an hour for a one-hour meeting. Some others failed to attend, did not RSVP before the meetings, and failed to communicate with the group after the meeting. Waiting for members to show up for a meeting limited the amount of time the team had for brainstorming, making the meetings seem rushed. To maximize productivity and ensure that everyone was on the same page, formal documentation of ideas was done in advance of physical meetings before presentation to the group for review. Because it was difficult to create a document from scratch, draft copies were brought to the meetings for the team to review and edit.

AR meeting fluidity. The democratic nature of the church ensured that AR meetings were open to all congregants. However, not all attendees were considered a part of the team
because of their refusal to provide informed consent. Dealing with a revolving door of
congregants who attended the meeting on an ad hoc basis slowed down the planning process
because a portion of every meeting was spent bringing attendees up to speed on issues that had
been discussed in their absence. Such efforts to include and engage these congregants seemed
pointless as these attendees were typically absent from the next meeting. In spite of its
drawbacks, the fluidity helped provide a broader perspective than would have been available if
planning meetings were only limited to AR team members. Valuable time was the cost of
obtaining this broad perspective.

**Urgency.** Mary, a youth teacher, stressed urgency to the AR team. At the early stages,
Mary had a discussion with her class of 15- to 18-year-olds to gather their input on program
planning. She also worked with one of her colleagues to replicate that discussion for the class of
13- to 14-year-olds. Mary and her colleague each reserved a segment of their lessons to inform
the youth about the AR project and solicit their input on the types of programs, topics, and
activities they would be interested in. As the youth made suggestions, the teachers took notes.
The feedback from those aged 15 to 18 are displayed in Table 7.
Table 7

Results of Brainstorming Session with Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to live for God in college</td>
<td>Need a mentor/never had a mentor</td>
<td>Feed the homeless; go downtown; volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Permanent, consistent teachers</td>
<td>More youth involvement; Vacation Bible School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>Younger teachers who are more relatable</td>
<td>Barbecue for teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Teachers who would be listened to and understood</td>
<td>Lock-in; help out other kids; bake sale; car wash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth retreat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to handle living out of state</td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth church takeover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit nursing homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit orphanage; visit Coca-Cola; visit aquarium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoos</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plays and dramas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School; things that happen there</td>
<td></td>
<td>Events during break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life situations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Restaurant outings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a Christian mentor in college</td>
<td></td>
<td>Movies; Hawks games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a good church in college</td>
<td></td>
<td>Six Flags; Skyzone; Malibu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things that happen when you grow up</td>
<td></td>
<td>D&amp;B; field trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying the Word of God to everyday situations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs/careers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being closer to God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The underlined items in Table 6 were highlighted by the youth as their areas of greatest interest. They also gave the names of the teachers within SGM whom they had a preference for when it came to the suggested topics; however, the names of the teachers have been excluded from this report to preserve their anonymity. Potential program events suggested by the 13- to 14-year-olds included debates, interviewing people in the public eye, trivia, Bible Jeopardy, overnight lock-ins (for game nights and pizza parties), and field trips. The results of these
discussions helped to streamline the thoughts of the AR team in relation to planning programs for the youth.

Mary was vocal about the need to hasten the planning process. She was concerned that each week spent talking about the problems and their possible resolution, was another week during which nothing was actually done to prevent the youth from engaging in delinquent behavior. During one meeting, she blurted out, “How long are we going to keep talking before we start doing something? These kids have needed help for a while now, yet we continue to discuss without taking any concrete action. If we do not act soon enough, I might stop coming to the meetings altogether.” Mary’s concerns resonated with some members and helped to refocus the team, while instilling a sense of urgency around the resolution of the identified problem.

**Generational divide.** During a meeting to discuss input from the youth, some adult members of SGM were present to hear what the youth were requesting. As the deliberations proceeded, it became apparent that the younger and more acculturated members of the AR team agreed with the youth’s suggestions, while the older members who were less acculturated were suspicious of their intentions. As the discussions proceeded and it seemed that the team was leaning toward approving a lock-in—an activity that the youth had been demanding for a while—one of the adult attendees yelled out, “No one is locking my children in this church. All they want to do is come in at night and engage in immoral activities; so, no child of mine will be attending.” Mary calmly responded, “That is because you don’t know what a lock-in is. If you took time to understand what it is, you would think differently of the proposal.” But the unyielding attendee reiterated, “I don’t want to know what it is! All I know is that no child of mine is attending it. I don’t care whatever name you call it. As long as it involves these youth coming to spend the night in church, I forbid it.” Other younger members of the team tried to
shed more light on the notion of a lock-in, but their attempts were to no avail. Another teacher, who vehemently disagreed with the arguments of Martha and Mary that the period would be used for prayer and fellowship, believed strongly that the youth had ulterior motives and wanted to use the period to engage in clandestine activities. Therefore, the lock-in did not make it onto the list of approved interventions.

**Mentoring program challenges.** When the AR team decided to implement a mentoring program as a part of the engagement initiatives, the most recent pioneer of a different attempt at a mentoring program at SGM, Moses, was asked to oversee it. But he refused, explaining that his experience from the last failed attempt (two years earlier) showed that many parents were not familiar with him or the team of young adults who had worked to implement the program. Consequently, they were unwilling to let their children participate. John, another AR team member who had witnessed the last failed attempt, stated, “Well, you guys were new to the church and unmarried, so people were not comfortable with you.” This statement offended Mary, who asked, “When did being married become a measure of responsibility?” Although Mary’s question was valid, John’s comment was an accurate depiction of SGM’s culture. Moses indicated, however, that he would be willing to support the program and provide any information from the previous trial. He then suggested that the AR team appoint a familiar face to head the new mentoring effort. Martha agreed to lead the mentoring program, as long as we provided support.

**Program funding.** Some AR team members served on other committees within the church, so they were familiar with the church’s financial constraints. These particular members indicated the most concern about allocating money for youth programs because they viewed that as creating more expenses for the church. Other members of the team reminded them that, for a
ministry to function, money had to be allotted for programs. Furthermore, the needs assessment survey had indicated that youth engagement was an area that most church members agreed needed improvement; therefore, funds needed to be allocated there.

The AR team also explored the possibility of youth fundraisers, which would involve youth selling items or providing services in order to raise money for their events. The items to be sold would include candy, cookies, chocolate, donuts, etc. Services to be rendered would include working at church events, running a car wash, mowing the church lawn, etc. However, some members doubted the potential success of such efforts. Some were uncertain about whether enough start-up funds for the youth programs could be generated. Someone suggested that a general “work purse” for the youth ministry be created: If other departments in the church needed the assistance of the youth for any event (e.g., babysitting on Couple’s Night), the compensation would be put in a “purse” for youth programs, instead of being disbursed to the individual youth. This suggestion, though, was rejected by many team members, on the basis that such an arrangement would cause only a few youth to bear the burden for the entire team. It would also encourage laziness among some youth if they knew that they would benefit from the hard work of others. Moses also asserted his belief that money was compensation for work done, so payment must be made immediately and directly to the worker, not deferred or diverted.

The subject of charging stipends for youth programs was also raised. The stipends would be paid by attendees of the youth programs, including the youth. The cost for the youth would technically be transferred to the parents as the youth weren't earning any money for themselves. However, this suggestion was quickly shelved due to concerns that stipends could lead to further disengagement among congregants. Team members were familiar with cases in which church
members under financial duress opted to stay away from activities with costs attached to them rather than express their inability to pay.

The AR team agreed finally that the church would set aside some funds for the youth ministry, and the youth teachers would do their best to stretch every dollar. Field trips, which the youth had requested, were not placed on the calendar as they were deemed to be fun activities that the church could not afford at the time. The subject of field trips would be revisited in the future, when additional funding became available. The trips could also be undertaken if the youth found resourceful ways to generate income for their programs. A budget was subsequently presented to the church leadership which was adopted without objection. Table 8 provides an overview of the interventions that were agreed upon as well as the proposed timelines for implementation.

Table 8

**Youth Engagement Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Action Research Team Activities</th>
<th>Anticipated Outcomes/ Connection to Problem</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Data Used to Evaluate the Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Inaugural Church Service</td>
<td>AR team members to work with church leaders and departmental heads to plan services</td>
<td>To create a forum for developing the youth ministry and discussing relevant practical issues</td>
<td>March 16, 2014 (subsequent services to be held on the 3rd Sunday of May, August, October, and December 2014)</td>
<td>i. Youth’s assessment of engagement ii. Alignment of discussion topics with identified performance objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Action Research Team Activities</td>
<td>Anticipated Outcomes/ Connection to Problem</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Data Used to Evaluate the Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring Fling/Meet Your Mentors</td>
<td>AR team to work with mentors to plan and facilitate the event</td>
<td>Educational/social event to familiarize youth with mentor</td>
<td>April 5, 2014</td>
<td>i. The number of mentor/mentee pairs able to make contact during the event</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Evangelism Day</td>
<td>AR team to work with church evangelism team to include youth members</td>
<td>Teach youth about the importance of sharing the good news about Christ and salvation</td>
<td>May 25, 2014</td>
<td>i. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ii. Ability of youth to effectively share the Gospel of Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Debate and Bible Trivia</td>
<td>AR team members to partner with church anniversary planners to include youth in annual bible trivia competition</td>
<td>To encourage and showcase in-depth knowledge of Christian doctrine</td>
<td>May 28, 2014</td>
<td>i. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. Youth performance on debate and trivia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Enrichment Programs</td>
<td>AR team members will collaborate with mentors to research available programs and provide assistance with application process</td>
<td>To assist youth in locating and applying for relevant summer programs</td>
<td>June and July (planning to begin in January)</td>
<td>i. Number of youth accessing and assimilating program information</td>
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<td>iii. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Day</td>
<td>AR team will work with youth leaders and other departmental heads to prepare youth to facilitate the adult church service</td>
<td>To provide an opportunity for teenagers to lead the church</td>
<td>July 13, 2014</td>
<td>i. Level of youth involvement and enthusiasm</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Action Research Team Activities</td>
<td>Anticipated Outcomes/ Connection to Problem</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Data Used to Evaluate the Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentor/Youth Back To School Social</td>
<td>Plan social event</td>
<td>To provide youth with practical tips and support as they begin a new school year</td>
<td>August 2, 2014</td>
<td>Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Stewardship Day (volunteering at various organizations that cater to the needy)</td>
<td>Coordinate activity by contacting various organizations and planning transportation</td>
<td>To provide an opportunity for youth to give back to the community</td>
<td>September 1, 2014 (Labor Day)</td>
<td>Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Tour/Career Planning</td>
<td>Identification and coordination of college visits and career planning workshops</td>
<td>To focus youth on career choices and provide exposure to college life</td>
<td>October 11, 2014</td>
<td>i. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Increase in youth knowledge and understanding of college and career options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movie/Dinner Night</td>
<td>Planning and coordination of event</td>
<td>To create a forum to teach youth about social etiquette and engage in practical discussions</td>
<td>November 22, 2014</td>
<td>i. Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. Increased awareness of acceptable social etiquette</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toys/Clothes Drive</td>
<td>Identify and coordinate with charitable organization</td>
<td>To teach youth about sacrificial giving</td>
<td>December 1-14, 2014</td>
<td>Youth’s assessment of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Training Workshop</td>
<td>Recruit mentors and schedule training</td>
<td>To adequately prepare youth mentors for their supportive role</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Effectiveness of mentor/mentee relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for scheduling the Youth Stewardship Day on Labor Day was to engage the youth in some kind of labor to support a noble cause. The AR team also knew that because
Labor Day is a public holiday, schools would be closed. However, the AR team did not realize that most charitable organizations would be closed on Labor Day as well; consequently, the event had to be rescheduled.

**Phase 3: Labor and Delivery – Program Implementation**

“It takes nine months to grow a baby, and only a matter of hours (though they may seem like very long hours) to bring one into the world. Yet it’s those hours that seem to occupy the minds of expectant women (and their partners) the most” (Murkoff, Eisenberg, & Hathaway, 2002, p. 337). This is an apt description for the implementation phase of an action research study. The planning culminates in an event that lasts a few hours but has been the central purpose of planners for months before.

Regarding this AR project, after the youth engagement programs had been identified and costs estimated for each event, the team sought approval for the activities. The pastor granted the funding on the same day the request was sent via email to him. He forwarded the request to the head of the Finance Department, indicating that he had already approved the disbursement of requested funds, and he made sure to copy me in the correspondence. As soon as permission was granted and funding provided for the activities listed in Table 8, the AR team began the work of implementation.

The implementation period took about 10 months. The evaluation phase of some interventions ran concurrently with the implementation phase for those interventions. More information on evaluation has been provided in later sections of this narrative.

Fewer individuals participated in the implementation of interventions than attended the planning meetings. On some occasions, the head count for the planning meetings was 14; yet, implementation was mostly carried out by four AR team members (i.e., Moses, Mary, Martha,
and Peter) and myself. David, Esther, John, Ruth, Joseph, and James assisted as their schedules permitted.

A summary of implementation meetings as well as key events that occurred during this phase is presented in Appendix G.

**Implementation Hallmarks**

The implementation phase lasted from March to December 2014. Several issues were raised during this phase. Some of these issues were interconnected, but they are described individually here for purposes of clarity. The first six concerns highlighted relate to the AR process while the last two relate to youth engagement.

**Group dynamics.** There were considerable changes in the ways group members associated with one another as the AR team transitioned from the planning to implementation phase. During the latter phase of the research project, I observed that the team worked more cohesively. The initial friction resulting from differences in background, knowledge, and skill set that individuals brought to the table had been more pronounced among team members early on. During the planning phase, people who had just begun working closely with each other saw things differently. They were also not shy about expressing disagreements. These dynamics are detailed in Chapter 5.

As the AR team transitioned into the implementation phase, however, I observed more actual team work and less hostility among members. Team members began to show appreciation for each other’s experiences as well as an understanding of how the cumulative skill sets and knowledge base of the group could more quickly enhance the efforts at bringing about better youth engagement. By this stage, all of the uncommitted visitors had dissipated. The AR team members also knew each other’s strengths better and consequently assigned roles to those best
suited for them. Decision-making was also easier because the smaller group of passionate people who were committed to the project were reachable through email, text messages, or the dedicated *WhatsApp* chat room. Furthermore, the additional challenge of finding a balance between their various commitments within and outside the group made members more aware of the need to work collaboratively to achieve a common cause.

**Communication.** Two major problems related to communication came to light during the implementation phase. The first involved the Mentor Training program. On April 5, 2013, I called the pastor to finalize plans for the Mentor Training scheduled for the following day. He assured me that he was ready for the program and mentioned that he had allocated time for a representative of the AR team to address the mentors about the expectations for the mentoring program. I was unaware of this item on the agenda, but the pastor stated that one of the leaders in the Children’s Department had been mandated to inform me. I was concerned about this lack of communication but grateful that we had time to put together a last-minute presentation.

The second issue arose around the implementation of the second youth service. A mentor, who was also a member of the choir, had agreed to sing during the service. However, she had been forbidden from doing so by her department head because I had not sought his permission to “borrow” a member of his department for the event. I was unaware of the approval process to which he alluded. To make matters worse, neither the choir leader nor the mentor notified me of this development until 10 minutes before the program was scheduled to start. Although the matter was resolved before the program commenced, I was concerned about the church’s communication channels and wondered how congregants could be expected to be aware of and follow directives that had not, in fact, been communicated to them.
Smaller team effectiveness. The first meeting to work out the logistics of program implementation was attended by only four people, as opposed to the typical 10 to 12. I had made up my mind to proceed as long as I had two people with whom to work. When Moses, who arrived late, found four people in the room, he exclaimed, “Thank God!” When I inquired about the reason for his response, he said:

I think we need a smaller quorum for us to move this thing along. I’ve always been wary about all these people that kept coming to the meetings, and things dragged on and on. I feel that at this stage of the game, the fewer the people you have, the faster you can get things along. Besides, the reality is that many of these people come into the meetings and speak, but don’t plan on doing anything, anyway.

Moses’ statement proved apt: For the remainder of the implementation phase, only four AR team members (Moses, Mary, Peter, and Martha) worked intensely. The other six (David, James, Esther, Joseph, Ruth, and John) attended meetings intermittently. However, they made earnest efforts to be kept informed of events that had taken place in their absence. As soon as it was time to roll up our sleeves, we noticed that the “talkers” had disappeared and only the “doers” remained. This smaller group made decision-making easier. Much work was also accomplished remotely, freeing the team from deferring decisions until they were taken up at physical meetings.

Punctuality. The punctuality of members became an issue during program implementation. As stated earlier, tardiness was a culturally acceptable norm in SGM. Unfortunately, because the youth were dependent on their parents, their own lateness to events and programs was inevitable. It was impractical and unacceptable to begin programs an hour or two later than scheduled, as was typical with other church activities, because many AR team
members had other commitments. To negotiate this behavior, incentives were offered to motivate youth to arrive early to events. In some cases, free breakfast was provided; in others, gift cards were given to punctual youth.

**Individual interviews.** There were times during planning and implementation meetings when I observed some AR team members hesitating to speak up. Because of my understanding of the Nigerian culture’s respect for elders and position, I surmised that the hesitation on the part of the younger members was due to their not wanting their disagreements on issues to be interpreted as antagonism or rudeness toward the elder congregants. In order to ensure that everyone present had equal opportunities to contribute to the study, I decided to interview individual team members. My suspicion about their willingness to openly participate, due to their age and how they might be perceived, was correct. These individual interviews provided more information and data for decision making. After the interviews were analyzed, I presented the emerging themes at an AR meeting centering on member checking. There was a consensus that the findings were in sync with the general experience of the team.

**Exhaustion within AR team.** Two of the major challenges to program planning which emerged from the individual interviews were related to time and availability. Burnout became apparent as we worked intensely from December 2013 to June 2014. The unsupportive mentors added to the existing burdens of AR team members. We realized that we needed help implementing and evaluating the remaining programs as originally planned.

The issue of lack of time was a crucial one. All the members of the AR team were employed full time. They also had other personal commitments. Therefore, they were only able to volunteer some of their spare time to work on youth programs. This challenge was clearly verbalized by Martha:
The main challenge I see is time. Although we all want the best for our youth, everyone is busy. Because of jobs, family, and other activities, we are all busy. So, the time we put into developing these programs is very limited. Some churches have people/professionals employed to do these tasks. Because we are all volunteers and most likely only think of church-related activities over the weekend or in our spare time, we lack time and experience needed for development.

I decided to discuss these challenges with the pastor during a meeting which had been scheduled to debrief him. I also decided that this meeting would be an excellent opportunity to solicit his support in finding help for the AR team.

**Pastor’s update.** During the debriefing meeting with the pastor, he and I also discussed some of the team’s challenges, including the need for space to conduct regular youth services, the need for consistency in youth teachers’ attendance and commitment to lesson plans, and the need for clarity regarding the organizational chart of SGM. The pastor seemed surprised by the findings and challenges. He assured me that he would focus on making necessary changes to address the issues.

In conversation with the pastor, I also addressed the need for a person in a paid position within the church to oversee the youth ministry. The AR team believed that the existence of such a position was important to the survival of the youth ministry. I was aware that the church had advertised a vacancy for a part-time position for a personal assistant to the pastor. I suggested that it be converted into a full-time position and that the role now include overseeing the youth ministry in addition to assisting the pastor. The pastor agreed to the suggestion and said the initial job description for the position could be modified because it was still in the development stage. The pastor discussed the initiative with the church leadership, the position
was revised, and a youth pastor was subsequently hired in July 2014. This hiring relieved the AR team of some of the burden of implementation.

**Youth accessibility.** Some of the youth did not attend programs or rehearsals because they were either not in church at the scheduled times or they had to leave church services at the same time as their parents. This was a concern for the AR team, since it was clear that for the youth to be engaged, the parents also needed to be engaged. The youth depended on their parents to get them to and from events. We were concerned about the limited time and access to prepare the youth for what they needed to do. To engage the parents, AR team members made conscientious efforts to keep parents informed of plans for events and rehearsals. On some occasions, the team provided meals to parents while they waited to collect their children, who were enjoying the activities that had been planned for them.

**Uncommitted mentors.** The AR team was concerned about the lack of commitment displayed by some mentors which eventually led to the failure of the mentoring program. Most of the mentors did not attend any event to which they have been invited to support the youth. Some did not attend trainings or contact their assigned mentees. We had specifically looked to the young adults when recruiting for mentors because we had believed they were the generation that would be most understanding of the American culture and the one to which the youth would be able to relate. Unfortunately, many of the young adults were transient, constantly moving out of state for one purpose or another—taking new jobs, marrying and leaving the church, or just moving out of the city. Some who lived in the city just did not attend church regularly. At first we divided the mentor/mentee pairs among planners to check on, but many would-be mentors had numerous excuses about why they had not reached out to their mentees. In addition, only three mentors showed up for the program we planned for them and their mentees in August. It
also became clear to the AR team that there was not much that could be done to remedy this situation, particularly as there were other events being planned.

From the onset, Mary communicated her skepticism about the mentor recruitment process. The mentor recruitment process began with Martha asking congregants (mostly young adults) if they were interested in volunteering for a few hours a week to mentor youth. She took the names and contact information of those who indicated their interest, then sent them forms to provide background information. Mary had argued that many individuals agree to participate in activities or to volunteer without considering the ramifications. She was concerned that many of the recruited mentors were of such a disposition. She insisted that the program should not solicit mentors but that prospective mentors should apply to work with the youth. Her argument was that the recruitment process created the impression that the mentors were doing the youth ministry a favor, whereas the opportunity should be presented as a mutual benefit whereby the mentors could count the time invested as community-service hours. Some team members agreed with Mary’s stance in theory, but there were concerns about its practicality, especially in a context lacking a volunteering culture.

By the conclusion of the action research project, the mentoring program had not recorded any success in terms of implementation. There were talks within the AR team about reviving it in the coming year. Some team members also suggested reaching out to older church members who were not as transient as the younger ones to serve as mentors.

**Phase 4: Postpartum – Program Evaluation**

After the safe delivery of a baby, both the mother and child undergo postpartum examination. It is also common for the mothers to receive tips on contraception, how to care for the newborn, and best practices for subsequent childbirth. Likewise, after the implementation of
youth engagement programs at SGM, assessments were performed to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions.

Multiple evaluation tools were used in this action research study. First, there was feedback, which was received informally from parents, youth, and other congregants during conversations after the interventions. This was followed by formal evaluations, which were conducted via a survey by the leadership of the youth ministry in November 2014, to obtain an overall assessment of the programs offered during the year and to determine program offerings for the following year. During this phase, the youth and adult congregants were surveyed about activities offered during the project year. Adult congregants that regularly worked with the youth also provided an assessment of the programs based on their interactions. Lastly, AR team participants communicated their evaluation of the project as part of the critical incident exit interview.

**Evaluation Survey**

The primary goal of the evaluation survey instrument was to identify the program preferences of the youth and adults. This was carried out by the youth pastor in November 2014, to solicit program and logistics ideas for the following year’s calendar (see Appendix I for a sample). Lastly, the instrument was used as a recruiting tool for youth and adults who were interested in joining the planning team.

Results from the youth survey indicated that 74% of the respondents were engaged by the program offerings, 13% were not, and 13% were undecided. Ninety-two percent of the adults reported that their children were engaged, and the remaining 8% did not respond. A college trip to Georgia Tech was voted “most popular” by the youth. Finally, 92% of the youth attended at least three youth programs during the year.
Some interventions were better received by the youth and their parents than others. The role of effective communication was also evident. Evaluation results revealed that some of the events were not well-attended because the youth were not aware of them. Parents were also concerned about the logistics of bringing the youth to events and picking them up. Most members lived over 25 miles from the church and already had to commute 45 minutes round trip on Sundays; therefore, attending events church on other days posed an additional challenge. Also, some of the youth programs were held at the same time as some other church programs but in different locations. This clash of timetables affected participation in youth programs, as precedence was given to adult programs.

The feedback received by the AR team led to changes (where possible) to upcoming programs in order to address stakeholder concerns. It was understood that the proposed changes would be implemented the following year. In addition to ensuring that regular announcements were made in church, Martha sent regular email and SMS reminders about upcoming programs to youth and parents. Parents were also encouraged to network and carpool with each other in order to get their children to youth events. The AR team made concerted efforts when possible to schedule youth events concurrently with church services so that parents were not required to make a separate trip to the church. We noticed that whenever we held programs on days other than Sundays, it became a knotty issue because of the back-and-forth commute parents had to make to church. So, we tried to schedule some programs on regular church days, when parents were coming to church anyway; otherwise, parents would view bringing their children as an additional burden. For instance, on a scheduled visit to the food bank on a Saturday, we were unaware that the Singles’ Fellowship had an event outside of church and that the Couples’ Fellowship had a dinner in a member’s house. The result was that parents ignored the youth,
since everyone was spread around the city. Therefore, our strategy was to host youth events concurrently with Sunday church services. Utilizing the block of time usually dedicated to church services for some youth events even meant that we were able to make a quick stop at the homeless shelter during a service, returning before the service was over.

**Evaluation from Interaction with Youth**

Many AR team members already played roles in the church, including in the Youth Department, which put them in a position to receive direct feedback from the youth regarding their views of the project (see Appendix H). Some team members also reflected on their observations of the youth since the implementation of the youth ministry and the ensuing programs. Martha stated,

> I think they like being involved when we have the youth church and they actually interact, talk, speak, preach sometimes, read their bible, play bible games, or even get to be a part of the choir themselves … Because, actually, I had a couple of kids that would call me up and on Friday and say “Aunty are you going to church?” And I respond, “Wait, you want to go to church?” I don’t remember feeling like that when I was that age. I ask, “You want me to pick you up to go to church? Are you sure you’re OK?” I can see that they want to go to church, interact, and hear the Word. They also want to interact with the grown-ups and they want to better themselves.

Ruth also provided a different perspective on the effect of the project, as her son is a part of the youth ministry. She said,

> Since I have a son that is actually part of the youth ministry, I know that I’ve seen changes in him just in having a few more friends and being a little bit more social in church than he was before he started this. So, I can see firsthand, at least from the youth
perspective, and the positive impact that it's having on them. I see that, just in general, they’re a lot happier, they want to know the date of their next program. Even the way they interact, I even see like, a bit more respect in the way that they interact, just by them being together.

Esther also noted, “It kind of created a bond among the youth. There’s now a bond among all of them. They talk to each other more.”

Mary spoke more about the areas in which she believed that the youth had learned the most:

They were exposed to a lot of different things that they hadn’t learned or known before. I think that educationally, socially, and maybe emotionally, I see some change. And I definitely see the children maturing. I think they learned basically social and leadership skills and not just about interacting with people in public. I think definitely they’ve learned and they internalized greatly. I think that some of the kids learned leadership skills that they didn’t have before. I also see that some of them have learned how to participate, and be articulate in activities that are public.

Martha also reported that she had noticed some positive behaviors exhibited by the youth. She said,

Before this, you come to church and you see kids hiding in the bathroom or taking extended breaks from class. But now you see them and they don’t need to lie. I’m not saying that you still don’t see that once in a while. But now these kids are actually staying in the classroom, they want to be taught, they’re asking for the teacher, and they are excited to get started. That’s the excitement I love seeing in them … So I think they
have felt loved in this past year, 2014. They felt that this is my church not just a place my parents drag me to every Sunday. That's something that's really special to see.

**Evaluation from Critical Incident Interviews**

The critical incident interviews provided AR team members with the opportunity to evaluate the project and its outcomes (see Appendix B). Analysis of the interviews revealed two main themes regarding the program evaluation. First, participants provided feedback based on their perspectives and offered rationales. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The AR team members gave their views about the project and also provided information on how they arrived at their views. For instance, if a person indicated that the project was a “success,” they backed their assertion with more information about what made them feel that way.

Many team members also provided additional information regarding their conversations and observations regarding youth engagement levels since the beginning of the action research project. Joseph stated, “I think it has gone beyond my expectation because although this is not the first program that was geared towards the children in this church, I have seen the result of this one.” Mary, another youth teacher, also said, “Honestly, what happened exceeded my expectations.”

Ruth, a mother of a youth and SGM's Event Coordinator, described her view of the outcome:

It actually exceeded my expectations. I thought it was just going to be a thing where we kind of take them, mentor them and say OK, we’re going to stick this person in this department and this person in that department and they’re all going to have a job. But when it started and they actually started to interact. They started learning different things and being exposed to different things. It actually exceeded my expectations.
Martha, who was responsible for coordinating the church’s tutoring program, concurred:

We did so much more than I expected for us to do this year. From the planning process to the events themselves, every single program left me in awe. It was just amazing how things went well even if I wasn’t at the actual event. I wasn’t around for the beach day or their youth day but from watching the videos and editing them I was amazed. I was kicking myself for not being there.

One of the reasons that Martha gave for stating that the project exceeded her expectations was the following:

What I mean by exceeded was that we were able to form an actual structure. It was not just a one-time thing. We drew up a plan that can work in any environment. Even if we’re not here, this plan has been put in place, and anybody can implement it. We can show it to other people and say, this is what we did.

Other AR team members who stated the project outcome met their expectations included Esther and John. Esther, a teacher of the younger children, stated, “I think it all aligned because compared to what we started with, there’s a huge, huge difference.” Similarly, John, a youth teacher, opined, “It was worth it; it met my expectations.”

Despite the AR team members’ admitted early skepticism about the outcome of the project, their feedback was largely. Esther reported that she was concerned about the willingness of parents to bring their children to youth programs on days other than Sundays. She said,

To be honest, initially I was like, is this thing going be a reality? Is it going to work? My fear was that, you call a church program, parents don’t even come. Now you’re telling them to bring their kids to church. That’s too much work for a lot of parents. Some would rather take time off work, so that they can take their kids to a birthday party, than
to bring them to church. But, looking at it thus far, there's been a huge difference. The attendance, to me, was awesome because that was my number one fear. Would people really bring their children on a weekend when they're supposed to be resting?

As a part of the interview, AR team members also identified specific areas where the outcome did not align with their expectations. Mary stated, “The places where it didn’t align were the mentoring program and more spiritual content. Spiritually, I felt like … I don’t think that some of our programs addressed that as well as we could have.” Martha and Ruth also expressed regret about the outcome of the mentoring program. Martha reflected that, “I think we were premature in introducing it, we weren’t ready. As a church, we weren’t ready. As a group, we weren’t ready, and we had so much that we were trying to do at the same time. So, that’s definitely one regret.” Ruth also said,

The mentoring program I think was one of the less successful parts of it just because of the mentors themselves who were not available. I think half of the mentors … I don’t even know if they are here … that’s one of the aspects that really didn’t come through. You have the few people that were committed, you know they came … but for the most part, a lot of the mentors themselves were just … you know … didn’t make themselves available.

**Conclusion**

Results from the evaluations revealed that overall the interventions resulted in increased youth engagement—the unsuccessful mentoring program notwithstanding. Indeed, the impact of this action research project on SGM and its congregants was immense. The project also built capacity for sustainability, including the hiring of a youth pastor to head a newly created youth
ministry with its own budget. This and other sustainability plans revealed the commitment of the church leadership to change.

Despite the increased engagement of youth through the program planning efforts of this action research project for SGM, results of the critical incident exit interviews of AR team members indicated there was one outstanding limitation. Because of an acute desire for a program of this nature, there was pressure within the AR team to begin interventions quickly. These anticipated interventions in the lives of SGM youth (which some AR team members argued was long overdue), coupled with exhaustion among team members from long deliberations on the issue, resulted in the premature implementation of some programs. Unlike other programs, these did not yield increased youth engagement. Feedback received from youth, parents, and other congregants was used to determine the impact of each program. Lessons were learned and considered during the next round of planning. The various data derived from this case answered the study’s research questions and are laid out in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to investigate the program planning dynamics in a faith-based organization which led to youth engagement. The study also aimed to share related implications for individuals involved in planning programs within faith-based organizations. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization?; (2) How are challenges negotiated during the program planning process?; (3) What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth?; and (4) What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth?

This chapter presents responses to the research questions from survey instruments, face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, group meetings, documents, and critical incident interviews with SGM congregants who were members of the action research (AR) team. The findings are organized by categories and themes that emerged from data analysis. Table 9 provides an overview of each research question, along with corresponding categories and themes.
Overview of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization? | Internal and external challenges | i. Unavailability of relevant parties  
ii. Lack of commitment  
iii. Generational differences  
iv. Cultural issues  
vi. Scheduling with external partners |
| 2. How are the challenges negotiated during the program planning process?         | Consensus building         | i. Interest-based negotiations  
ii. Equal and respectful voice |
|                                                                                  | Broad outreach             | i. Liaising with other church departments  
ii. Consultation |
|                                                                                  | Forging ahead              | i. Flexibility/adaptability  
ii. Creativity  
iii. Planning around church events |
| 3. What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth? | Creation of a youth ministry | i. Focusing AR on youth  
ii. Hiring a youth pastor  
iii. Development of programs  
v. Youth at the planning table |
|                                                                                  | Development of youth programs | iv. Participation in youth programs |
| 4. What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth? | Individual                | i. Yielding to strengths  
ii. “Cut off dead weight”  
iii. Patience  
iv. Delegation  
v. Importance of team building |
|                                                                                  | Group                      | i. Value of AR  
ii. Appreciation for team work |
|                                                                                  | System                     | i. Increased congregant involvement |

Challenges to Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

The first research question investigated the challenges associated with planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in Salvation Global Ministries. Data
gathered in response to this question assisted the discernment of why SGM was unable to engage its youth and why prior attempts failed. To comprehend these challenges, data from interviews, observations, and meeting notes were analyzed. Two major categories of data—internal and external challenges—emerged, along with six themes: (a) unavailability of all parties, (b) lack of commitment, (c) generational differences, (d) cultural issues, (e) other church programs, and (f) scheduling with external partners. Table 10 summarizes the findings.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal and external challenges</td>
<td>i. Unavailability of relevant parties</td>
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<td>ii. Lack of commitment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>iii. Generational differences</td>
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<td>iv. Cultural issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>v. Other church programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>vi. Scheduling with external partners</td>
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</table>

Unavailability of Relevant Parties

The fundamental challenge with program planning at SGM was the unavailability of planners, youth, and their parents. Many members of SGM had to commute 45 minutes round trip to church, making it difficult for planners to rally all participants whose involvement was relevant to the program planning effort. This challenge was noted by John, an AR team member:

The challenges are … availability. Availability of whosoever is concerned. Availability of people planning the program and then of course the youth. If their parents are there, they will also be there. Availability is the main thing, and then of course, living true to
what we say we will do. You know if we say we will do this, we try as much as possible to be able to be there, to be able to live up to what we have said.

Martha, another AR team member, noted the challenge with availability but posited that low participation might have been due to a lack of time. She said,

Although we all want the best for our youth, everyone is busy. Because of jobs, family, and other activities, we are all busy. So the time we put into developing these programs is very limited. Some churches have professionals employed to do these tasks. Because we are all volunteers and most likely only think of church related activities over the weekend or in our spare time, we lack the time and experience needed for development.

Martha also spoke about the role of parents in ensuring that youth were available for programs. She stated,

One of the problems that we had also was that the kids might want to come but if the parents can’t bring them, what are we going to do? We talked about people carpooling as an option but they don’t always take us up on it. The parents may also decide that they don’t feel like getting up to drive all the way to church for the programs or that it’s more important for the youth to watch other siblings or do your homework. It’s not just what’s important to the kids, it’s what’s important to the parents because without the parents the kids can’t come.

**Lack of Commitment**

The lack of commitment of individuals involved in various aspects of the programs was another challenge to program planning for youth at SGM. Mary, a youth teacher and AR team member, reflected that “I have found that someone might have attended the most prestigious schools in the world, but if they do not share the same desire and commitment to the project at
hand, things will not get done.” Martha expressed that “While most, if not all, of us see that there is a problem, only a few are willing to do what is necessary to fix the problem.” Martha’s assertion was buttressed by the number of congregants (10) who volunteered to serve on the AR team, even though 102 adults indicated on the needs assessment survey that the area of youth engagement should be a research focus. Mary further addressed the commitment challenge as follows:

The children and parents do not get it. The other problem is a lack of relationship with God and hunger for God that is needed to fuel the commitment. I am trying to shield the kids from the devil but the kids are not taking it seriously. We also need commitment from the leaders of the Ministry. All the people that are trying to help should be of one accord. Without commitment we will regress to our old ways.

**Generational Differences**

The generational gap among the program planners, the youth, and the adult congregation also posed a challenge in the course of program planning. During one planning meeting, there was a disagreement between an AR team member and another congregant who occasionally attended the meetings. They vehemently disagreed on the types of programs that the team should offer. As the group worked to resolve the disagreement through discussion, it became apparent that the congregant misunderstood what the program entailed. Moses, an AR team member who witnessed the incident, commented,

It’s kind of like we are all of the same culture but we are not all of the same generation. It’s the generational difference that is the age. The age designations in SGM is primordial. So there’s a mode between 40 and 60 and another mode between 20 and 40 or 15 and 35 or thereabout. There has not been an effective middle ground between those
two. I’m not even talking about the youth right now; I’m talking about the church itself. I think that’s a factor that always comes into every program that is planned in the church. It’s a generational difference that is not exactly cultural but a big factor in it. There’s no middle ground. It’s kind of seen as an old church or old people’s church. So the younger people … I think have a problem passing their ideas across or getting it accepted among the older ones. I think that’s one issue with program planning at SGM. There is a communication gap between those two generations. A certain generation definitely predominates and there is no effective communication between the two so that the younger can also get their views aired and I think that’s a big issue with getting things done at the church.

Martha shared another perspective on the challenge of the generational gap:

I know that a few years ago, one of the problems that the teenagers had was that some adults were complaining that the teenagers were disrespectful. Interestingly, the teenagers were saying the same thing about the adults—that the adults were disrespectful. The adults didn’t take the time to look out for the kids and the kids didn’t take the time to know the adults either. This was because when you are a teenager, the only thing that’s important is what’s important to you. You don’t care about anybody and you want everybody to care about you.

Cultural Issues

Some nuances peculiar to Nigerian culture also arose during the program planning effort. These affected both the planning and implementation of programs. Moses provided some background information on the culture at SGM and noted specific areas in which it was exhibited:
The fact that SGM is predominantly a Nigerian church affects the way we plan things. Even though we don’t bring out this factor every time … it is obvious that we are caught in between two cultures. There is culture we brought with us and there is another culture we are living with. But we are not at par with either of them. We are somewhere in between and this actually affects project implementation, program planning, and the ideas we have. So while we still try to retain the culture of our origin, we also try to adapt to the culture where we live. But it actually affects our ideas, especially with our program of planning for youth who are mostly mono-cultural because they were born here. That created a lot of clashes of ideas between those who came here as adults and people who were actually born here. That was idea-wise. Now in the actual processes, the issue of “African time” (the habit of arriving extremely late for events) was predominant during the program planning. I also think the immigrant nature affected opinions and communication.

Mary's view of the cultural issues mirrored those highlighted by Moses. She said,

I believe that there is a cultural perspective to this. I work with Caucasians and some of the social norms that have become acceptable in our church are not acceptable elsewhere. People do not show up for meetings and are unapologetic about it. They are never on time. They promise to do something and just ignore it without giving any explanations. They are not considerate of other people’s time and they treat things like it is an option instead of their job. I would expect that they show up to work on time but if anything is in the church, they are never on time. I think it is culturally linked.
David addressed the Nigerian culture’s focus on education, which impacted the types of programs that were offered because the AR team realized that the programs should be mutually acceptable to youth and their parents. David noted,

I think some cultures are so relaxed with their kids’ education but not the Nigerian culture. The Nigerian culture is all education and God. That’s it. It’s God, education, education, God and nothing else. It’s not to say that it’s a horrible thing but there has to be balance. It’s like if you have a wheel and you only have two sticks to balance that wheel out, it’s going to wobble. You’re going to need a few more sticks to balance that wheel out. Then, you can have God, education, family, fun, and other different aspects.

Moses highlighted the need to consult with parties not directly involved with program planning:

I do not want to say that it is entirely cultural for us but part of our culture is everyone wants to feel respected and honored. So, you actually, at some point, have to communicate what is going on with people. You actually have to make it seem like you are consulting them even when there is no need for it and both parties know that there is no need to consult them. But they require or request it because culturally it is disrespectful to them to not have been consulted on that issue. So I think that culture has a major effect.

Other Church Programs

Another challenge to program planning related to conflicts with other church programs. Because the youth were dependent on their parents for transportation, their needs were treated as low priority when the timing for their programs clashed with other church programs. According to Martha,
One of the reasons a lot of people didn’t show up for the 101 thing was that there were several programs outside of church that we weren’t aware of. I think the couples had a dinner and the singles had a thing too later that day.

Many AR team members shared this view, identifying it as one of the major reasons for that event’s poor turnout.

**Planning with External Partners**

Partnering with external organizations also proved to be a challenge as the AR team planned programs for youth. Although the team worked diligently to schedule youth programs around events that were already on the church calendar, external partners were unaware of the church calendar. Therefore, they would only accommodate the youth at their convenience. Mary expressed the frustration of the team at accommodating the schedules of external partners:

> All these things changed because there were circumstances beyond us. The Labor Day event didn’t take place because we didn’t plan on time and we didn’t know we had to...

If something didn’t go the way we planned it some of it was due to external factors beyond our control.

Ruth agreed by recalling that, “the rescheduling of the community food bank event was really beyond our control. The only decision to be made was whether to replace it with something else, which was not feasible. So the decision was made for us.”

In summary, responses to the first research question indicated that AR team members faced multiple challenges as they worked to plan, implement, and evaluate youth engagement programs. Some of the challenges were intrinsic to the nature of SGM and its congregants; others were created by parties outside the planning team but within other areas of the church; and still others associated with agencies that were not a part of SGM. The action research project
heightened the awareness of AR team members to the existence of these challenges and how they
impact program planning in SGM.

**Negotiation of Challenges during Program Planning Process**

The second research question explored was how the AR team negotiated challenges
during program planning. Analysis of interview data and meeting notes indicated the existence
of three main strategies which involved eight themes. Table 11 below summarizes these
findings.

Table 11

*Strategies for Negotiating Challenges during Program Planning Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are the challenges negotiated during the program planning process?</td>
<td>Consensus building</td>
<td>i. Interest-based negotiations</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ii. Equal and respectful voice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad outreach</td>
<td>i. Liaising with other church departments</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ii. Consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forging ahead</td>
<td>i. Flexibility and adaptability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Planning around church events</td>
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</table>

**Consensus Building**

The AR team made decisions in a collaborative manner which built consensus among
members. This strategy involved ensuring that all members had the opportunity to express and
defend their views. These ideas were then compared to the team’s interest in youth engagement
to assess alignment. If the ideas aligned with the team’s interests, were feasible to implement,
and were agreeable with all members, then the team moved for adoption. In describing the process, John said, “It was all consensus. Someone would come up with an idea and we all thought it over … If the idea fits, its stays, and if it doesn’t fit it is dropped.”

**Interest-based negotiations.** The AR team members had a fundamental common interest, which was to ensure that the youth were engaged; consequently, there were no major conflicts among team members. Additionally, the faith-based environment of SGM encouraged civil discourse. Esther, an AR team member, maintained, “There weren’t any conflicts per se. There were disagreements, but that is inevitable.” There were differences of opinion and other minor disagreements which were resolved by focusing on what was most beneficial to the youth. Of this, Martha stated that “Keeping the objective of what we were trying to accomplish in mind was definitely key.”

Mary recalled an incident, during the implementation of an event, in which team members disagreed on logistics. She stated,

> We talked about it as a group and we all weighed in. We all gave supportive arguments for what we thought was right. The group decided as a whole what would be best…. All of the decisions we made were based on the interest of the kids. Every single decision was based on the interest of the people we were serving which were the children.

**Equal and respectful voice.** According to the participants, the AR team’s decision-making process was respectful, and all voices were equal. The equality of voice that participants reported, however, was contrary to my experience of some of the interactions. There were times during the planning phase of the project when the pastor’s wife attended AR meetings and team members were quick to defer to her judgment. However, in recounting the planning events, team members made no reference to those instances and seemed to focus on the interactions among
team members to conclude that all voices were equal. This equality of voice was emphasized by several AR team members. Esther remarked, “Everybody had a voice. People could voice their opinions and everybody’s voice was heard.” Peter also noted, “I would say everybody had a voice but some people talked more. Some talked more, some talked less. But, we never threw away anybody’s argument. We’ve been welcoming.”

Respectful discourse was also highlighted by some members as beneficial to the negotiation process. Peter maintained that “Disagreements were resolved because one of the things we practiced was mutual respect.” Similarly, Ruth stated, “There was no one talking over each other.”

**Broaden Outreach**

As part of the AR team’s effort to negotiate the aforementioned challenges, the team reached out to other departments in the church. This was consistent with Senge’s (2006) assertion that the successful change in one part of a system is dependent on the willingness of other parts to make corresponding changes to accommodate the desired goal. Because the youth ministry is one arm of SGM, it was essential that all other departments in SGM were kept abreast of pertinent plans. This prevented the “ruffling of feathers” within the system. Specifics of how the AR team accomplished this are discussed below.

**Liaising with other church departments.** Because the youth ministry was a subsystem of the larger SGM system, it was necessary to liaise with other departments. In her description, Martha said,

There is a process or a channel that we have to go through. Yes, we come together as a community and we make decisions; we plan what we’re going to do but we still have to go through the church. We still have to go through the heads of the departments. We still
have to go through whomever, whether it’s the finance department, the assistant pastors or the pastor himself.

**Consultation.** The AR team also engaged in consultation with key leaders of SGM in order to discuss obtaining resources for the youth ministry. As Martha asserted,

There is a process or a channel that we have to go through. We come together as a community and we make decisions and plan what we’re going to do but we still have to go through the church. We still have to go through the heads of the departments; we still have to go through whatever, whether it’s finance or the pastors or pastor himself.

The debriefing meeting with the pastor (at which the team discussed some of the challenges it faced during the implementation phase) that led to the hiring of a youth pastor to oversee the youth ministry also required consultation. Similarly, the team had to bypass some department heads when they were unavailable and instead work directly with the assistant pastors or deacons in charge of those departments to expedite the program planning process.

**Forging Ahead**

The AR team was able to effect change in SGM because team members were passionate about the work. They continued to forge ahead in the midst of challenges. This was accomplished through adaptability, flexibility, and creativity, and by planning around church events.

**Adaptability and flexibility.** The ability of the team to quickly regroup when plans were diverted helped to keep the project on course. Of this attribute, Martha said,

I think we’ve developed some adaptation kind of thing. I don’t know if it’s reflexes but we’re flexible in everything we do. It makes it easier to come up with solutions to problems. There’s always some problem but it’s not so noticeable because we quickly
get together or we quickly reach out to one another. I think that’s great. That’s what makes it work.

**Creativity.** Planners used creativity to negotiate the “African time” challenge. After experimenting and deliberating, the team realized that members were usually punctual for events held outside the church. This was because the team always warned parents that the church bus would leave at a certain time. Failure to arrive on time would result in parents having to take their children to the event venue themselves. Consequently, a considerable number of events were held away from SGM premises.

The team also decided to offer prizes at the door to the most punctual teenagers at church-hosted events. Commenting on the resulting punctuality, Joseph said,

> When it was noticed that people were showing up late for events, a team member suggested that we give out door prizes to those that arrived on time. I had totally forgotten about it when I saw people coming early. A teenager came later but wasn’t given a gift card and he complained that they didn’t give him one. It was then that I remembered that the gift cards were for those who came early and not just for everybody.

I really think that was very effective.

Another creative idea was to publicize events as starting earlier than the actual scheduled time and provide snacks and games for those who arrived early. This strategy was exemplified during an event at which a panel of experts was invited to speak to the youth and their parents. To ensure the availability of a captive audience, the program was publicized as beginning at 10 a.m., but the panelists were informed that they would begin speaking at 11 a.m. This gave time for latecomers to arrive and settle down before the event began.
Planning around church events. The AR team discovered that in order to gather support for youth programs, they had to ensure that the youth programs did not coincide with other church programs. This would put youth programs in the spotlight as opposed to being overshadowed by other programs being held at the same. To accomplish this, planners accessed the church calendar and ensured that scheduled youth programs did not conflict with any other events. Joseph alluded to this practice when he said,

You don’t want to schedule stuff on the same day of another church event. You also don’t want to schedule stuff when we [i.e., the church] had an event the previous week. We know from experience that when we do this we don’t usually have a good result.

In summary, the findings in response to the second research question indicate that the AR team utilized various techniques in negotiating the various challenges they faced as they worked to plan youth programs. The negotiation tactics were developed from lessons learned from prior experience implementing programs. Furthermore, the negotiated strategies were chosen in a collaborative manner and were based on the interest of the youth.

Changes that Resulted in Increased Youth Engagement

The action research team discovered that in order for SGM to achieve its goal of youth engagement, the faith-based organization needed to shift away from the status quo. Findings from the project revealed that the creation of a youth ministry and the development of youth programs were instrumental to youth engagement. Four themes were identified as key to enhanced youth engagement in SGM: (1) focusing the action research on youth, (2) hiring a youth pastor, (3) developing youth programs, and (4) including youth at the planning table. Table 12 summarizes the findings.
Table 12

Changes that Resulted in Increased Youth Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 3</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth?</td>
<td>Creation of a youth ministry; Development of youth programs</td>
<td>i. Focusing AR on youth ii. Hiring a youth pastor iii. Development of programs iv. Participation in youth programs v. Youth at the planning table</td>
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Focusing AR on Youth

The first step taken by SGM to engage the youth was the collaborative decision to focus the AR project on the youth. This decision was influenced by the results of a needs assessment survey conducted within the church. Interviews also revealed that in the months leading up to the needs assessment survey, there had been concerns from various quarters about the issue of youth engagement.

Peter recalled a meeting some months before the AR project was introduced where the pastor had asked, “What are we going to do with these youth?” Also, in response to a question about her motivation to join the AR team, Ruth said,

What motivated me to join this group was that last year we did a magazine and the teenagers wrote articles. The main theme of those articles was how the teenagers were not interested in church; how they felt that they didn’t really matter. There were also general comments I heard just from interacting with them that they felt like they were ignored in the church. There are children and there are adults but they didn’t feel like they had a place.
These comments and others underscore the fact that this AR project addressed a pressing need for the organization.

**Hiring a Youth Pastor**

The decision by church leadership to hire a youth pastor introduced a major change in the structure of SGM. It also sent a clear message to all stakeholders that the church was serious about engaging its youth. Moreover, the fact that leadership was willing to create the position to address a pressing need energized the AR team.

Some of the AR team members articulated the value of a youth pastor. For instance, Peter noted,

> So, the decision to have a youth pastor was a good one even though some people may ask, why do we need a youth pastor? But right now, it’s making sense because somebody is here in the office doing background work. You need somebody who is there 24/7 that will be able to coordinate and oversee that department.

Similarly, Ruth expressed the need for a youth pastor as follows:

> They need someone that is specifically geared to understanding the needs of the youth because it takes a certain type of personality and a certain type of mindset to be able to interact effectively with the youth. Not everyone because some people are very authoritarian that they just say this is how it is and they are not willing to bend. That is not an effective way to deal with youth. Yes they need discipline but they also need someone to hear them and if you are not that personality then that’s not for you. So you need to have someone who specializes in that for your youth ministry.
Development of Youth Programs

As part of the task of engaging the youth, the AR team worked to create a sustainable structure for the youth ministry. Activities around this task included creating a separate budget for the youth ministry and hiring of a youth pastor as well as planning, implementing, and evaluating programs geared toward the educational and spiritual development of youth.

Planners also developed programs to appeal to multiple stakeholders because the AR team recognized that if both the parents and the youth did not buy into the programs, attendance at events would be poor and result in an inability to impact the youth. Because of the familiarity of the AR team with the church culture, the educational and spiritual components of programs were designed to appeal to parents, while still offering fun activities which the youth desired. An example was a college campus visit, of which Ruth recalled,

I think one of the turning points was actually the college trip because I think that’s when the parents finally saw and had a better idea of the goal of the program…. That was when the parents’ involvement increased and that was so important. That was the one that parents probably saw as the most valuable because some of the other programs were more about the children having fun and enjoying themselves. As parents, we don’t care as much about the kids having fun as we do about things that are oriented towards their future, their future goals or things that align with what we want for them.

Participation in Youth Programs

Implementing youth programs created the opportunity for youth to attend and to be engaged through participation. The evaluation survey administered to the youth at the end of the program year asked if they were engaged by program offerings. The results indicated that 74% were engaged, 13% were not engaged, and 13% were undecided. Further analysis of the data
revealed that 94% of the youth who attended three or more of the programs offered during the project year were engaged by the program offerings. Sixty-seven percent of the youth who reported not being engaged attended two programs or fewer. These results suggest a positive correlation between youth participation in programs and youth engagement. In addition, Ruth, an AR team member, shared the effect that participation in the youth ministry and programs have had on her son:

Since I have a son that is actually part of the youth ministry, I know that I’ve seen changes in him just in having a few more friends, as in being a little bit more social in church than he was before he started this, so I can see firsthand at least from the youth perspective as well the positive impact that its having on them.

As such, the AR team continues to work diligently to make the programs accessible to all youth at SGM.

**Youth at the Planning Table**

One of the most important tasks that the AR team undertook in planning was finding out from the youth what they wanted from the church. The youth teachers on the AR team were assigned this task and subsequently presented a list which considered and consulted during event planning. As a result of the evaluation of the programs for the project year, it became obvious that the youth needed to take ownership of their programs. The AR team agreed that it would be expedient to include some youth as part of the planning committee as the church worked to sustain the youth ministry and programs created by the AR project. The youth were asked to elect four representatives from among them to become a part of the planning committee. Esther explained this development in the following way:
I think another thing that we had implemented was the representative from the youth. I think that was a very good thing because they see what we’re doing. They will probably occupy the positions we’re occupying in the next few years, so it’s a way to learn from them as they learn from us too. They can also go back to their peers and say, this is what they said, this is what we could have done better. I think it was just like putting heads together.

The AR teamed believed that this approach would improve the youth’s involvement and sense of belonging necessary to sustain the ministry and programing.

In summarizing the findings related to the third research question, the need for SGM to change and the willingness of the church leadership to support change were evident. The AR team effected change because it had the support of key stakeholders and because a majority of SGM congregants were invested in the change initiative. The AR team also recognized and geared program planning toward the needs of multiple stakeholders to result in win-win situations.

**Individual, Group, and System Learning**

Data from the critical incident exit interviews of AR team members provided evidence of learning at the individual level as well as group and system levels. Individual learning included yielding to strengths, attentiveness to commitment, patience, and delegation. Group learning included appreciation for teamwork and value of AR. System learning led to increased congregant involvement. These findings are highlighted in Table 13.
Table 13

*Learning as a Result of Action Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 4</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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| What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth? | Individual | i. Yielding to strengths  
   ii. “Cut off dead weight”  
   iii. Patience  
   iv. Delegation  
   v. Importance of team building |
| | Group | i. Value of AR  
   ii. Appreciation for team work |
| | System | i. Increased congregant involvement |

**Individual Learning**

Individual growth and learning can be thought of as personal mastery (Senge, 2006). It is a way in which organizations learn, but it does not guarantee organizational learning. AR team members reported that they gained new knowledge by participating in the project. This is synonymous with action learning, which scholars have defined as learning from working on an actual project or problem (O’Neil & Marsick, 2007). In this project, some of the learning was unique to individuals while others were common among several team members. These learnings are discussed below.

**Yielding to strengths.** During their critical incident exit interviews, several AR team members confirmed that they had learned the importance of assigning tasks based on group members’ areas of specialty. They found that this enhanced productivity within the group. John asserted that,
Wisdom and knowledge are not exclusive to any particular individual. The Bible says “Two are better than one,” even though we add to that and say “two good heads are better than one.” When working with others I saw areas that I was not too good at, but I also saw others who were very proficient in those areas, so I deferred to them. It was a pleasure working with them because I learned from each and every one of them.

Martha also stated,

When we talked about our youth department certain voices such as the teachers stood out because they had more interaction with the kids. If anybody had more ideas on how our kids would respond to something, it would be the teachers. I think we tended to take what some of the teachers had to say into more consideration. It just made more sense because when you’re talking about certain subjects you look to the experts. In this case, the teachers of the teenagers were our experts because we don’t all deal with the kids on a weekly basis as they do.

“Cut off dead weight.” The need to pay attention to the commitment of members and eliminate those individuals who were not passionate about or pertinent to accomplishing the project goals was noted by a couple of AR members. They argued that such individuals slowed down the progress of the team. Mary commented,

There were people who no matter how many text messages or emails you sent them they just didn’t show up and it wasn’t that they weren’t around. Even when they showed up it was just a lot of talk and not a lot of anything being done. These persons demonstrated for me very early that they were not committed because they weren’t committed to showing up for meetings. Therefore I couldn’t place any expectations on them as far as any of these programs we’re planning are concerned. That’s what I mean by “cutting off
the dead weight” because I need to recognize that this person is probably not as committed to the cause as I am, and I need to minimize my expectations.

Moses also indicated that,

I learned that letting everyone have a say was a good thing especially in the beginning stages of the project. If this was not done there was a chance that we would have missed some important points. However in the later stages it was better to have only the minimum necessary people at meetings. That made things move faster, brought about less argument, and reduced the number of people we had to carry along.

**Patience.** A few AR team members reported learning patience through the project. Peter said, “You really need patience to work with the teachers and volunteers because they could drive you crazy. No matter how good your plans are they will just go down the drain if you let someone drive you crazy.” During her interview, Martha also shared her thoughts on honing patience:

We all wanted to do something good for our kids, our church, and our community. But the problem that we faced was that we wanted to see immediate results. I’m not saying not to expect results, it’s just that things don’t happen overnight.

**Delegation.** One AR team member reported learning how to assign tasks to others and reduce the pressure on any one individual. Martha explained,

We’re learning to delegate. There’s no way you can do everything by yourself. I’m one of those people that’s always running around to take care of everything. I leave the minimal to people so that even if they mess it up, I have a backup. But I found through this experience that I don’t have to do that. I don’t have to be this, that, and everything
else. We have capable people that can do it if you learn to delegate properly. I definitely took a lot from this. I found out a lot about our members that I didn’t know.

**Importance of team building.** The need to build a team of individuals who were passionate and working toward the same goal was stressed by Mary:

I learned that it was better to work with people, who had a strong desire, same drive and commitment to get the work done. I realized that it was not enough to have a purpose but it was also important to have people around you who had varying skills. Some people were good with ideas, some with planning, some administration, and so forth. It is just like with a church. You can be a good preacher, but if you do not have committed people around you, you cannot be successful.

Ruth detailed how she would apply her learning on the importance of team building:

The one thing that I have learned and I really think is applicable to other aspects of the church is the importance of play. I ignored those team-building activities; all those different things like going to the beach that really helped to strengthen the group as a whole. I think that taking part in different team-building activities will add value to us as a church moving forward. I think it would benefit us because we would just end up interacting, a little better.

**Group Learning**

“Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire” (Senge, 2006, p. 218). The team that planned youth programs in this action research project was able to increase youth engagement because of the alignment of team members. The group also learned together in the process of accomplishing the goal. Some of the learnings are highlighted below.
**Value of action research.** The group agreed that AR was a valuable research methodology. Martha noted that the way in which our team utilized the methodology during this project contrasted sharply with some other committees she had worked with in the past. She said,

I think that one of the things that makes our committee work is that not only do we come and discuss it; we actually get in there and do the work. The committees that I’ve seen or been a part of are not like this one…. I say committee when I refer to our team but it really was not a committee. To me it was just a group of people getting together and getting things done. I really like that. The action makes a huge difference. Like I said, committees have been done and done. We have mastered in committees but action in my opinion we haven’t done.

**Appreciation for teamwork.** The project also gave the AR team members a renewed sense of value for a team approach to problem-solving. Esther said that she learned to “never write off any suggestions or thoughts that people had.” Joseph also said, “I think the team was a good one. We knew that people were very involved. They liked doing what they were asked to do, so everybody was willing to participate. That helped to make sure things worked out.”

Mary asserted that having a team with people in different roles took away the pressure:

I used to feel burned out, but not anymore. It used to be that if I did not do it, it would remain undone. But working with people who were just as committed as I was, meant that if I did not do it, someone else picked up the slack.

**System Learning**

System learning can be the result of team learning. The teams that learn become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization, and the team’s accomplishments can lead to
a standard of learning within the larger organization (Senge 2006). The AR team at SGM was one such microcosm whose undertakings influenced other parts of the larger organization. AR team members, other adult congregants, and the pastor highlighted ways that the project impacted SGM.

**Increased congregant involvement.** AR team members were pleased with the way that the project impacted the entire church. Since AR team members served on various church committees, some transferred their learning from this project to other parts of the church. Others observed a renewed energy and motivation among members to be more involved. Martha shared the following:

> We are growing. Not just in the youth department, but also as a church. From what I noticed, in the past there were a few church members that always volunteered. But from this action thing you started, we’ve grown. We are now such a big community of doers. It’s not just one or two people that are doing by themselves, it’s more of a group that is getting things done.

Similarly, during the final debriefing session with the pastor, he reflected on the difference that the AR project had made in the church. He asserted that the youth were more excited about church and observed that some of the parents who had not been very involved in church activities were getting more involved and inquiring about ways they can help. He further commented on the leadership traits that the youth were beginning to exhibit and how parents have commended the church for the renewed effort to engage the youth.

AR members also discussed informal feedback they have received from friends and relatives who also attend SGM. Most of the views have been complimentary and positive. Pointers were also provided on ways to improve. Some parents expressed that the youth
department was currently the most vibrant unit in the church and that they were willing to assist wherever needed. Many others encouraged the team to continue the good work and hoped that the effort would not cease when the AR project ended.

In summarizing the responses to research question four, it is evident that the AR process led to the generation of learning at different levels within the organization. The learning at the individual level varied among different team members and reflected the diversity in the team. The learnings reported from this study are important in developing SGM into an organization that is capable of transformation (Watkins & Marsick, 1993) and adapting to inevitable change.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The main purpose of this action research case study was to plan, implement, and evaluate youth engagement programs in an immigrant faith-based organization and to investigate the dynamics of the program planning process. Four research questions guided the study:

1. What are the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization?
2. How are the challenges negotiated during the program planning process?
3. What changes in a faith-based organization’s activities result in the increased engagement of youth?
4. What learning occurs at the individual, group, and system levels as a result of the action research team engaging in program planning for youth?

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings related to each of the research questions listed above. It then draws conclusions from the findings and, finally, highlights implications for practice and theory.

Summary of Findings

Concerned adults in Salvation Global Ministries, an ethnic faith-based organization, constituted an action research (AR) team which planned programs to engage the organization’s youth. The AR team collaborated for one year to plan, implement, and evaluate youth engagement programs. The action research case study conducted around these activities generated findings that illuminated the challenges with program planning within the
organization, the ways these challenges were negotiated, the changes in SGM’s activities that resulted in the engagement of youth, and the individual and collective learning that took place as a result of the action research process.

**Challenges to Program Planning**

The process of program planning at SGM was fraught with a combination of internal and external challenges. Planners had to deal with the unavailability of youth, their parents, and, in some cases, other planners themselves. The unavailability of youth was closely tied to the unavailability of parents because the youth were dependent on their parents for transportation to and from events. Parents on the other hand had to navigate the challenge of long commutes to church. SGM is not a typical neighborhood church: Because it caters to a specific niche, congregants choose to travel from all over the city in order to attend services. Therefore, the idea of making multiple weekly trips to SGM was not appealing to most parents. Planners’ lack of availability related to the voluntary nature of their role. Planners held full-time jobs outside the church and also had family and other commitments. Therefore, they attended to the planning process only in their spare time.

Lack of commitment was another challenge for planners. Several planners tied availability to commitment and argued that, in spite of personal commitments outside church, people had a tendency to create time for activities that fueled their passion. Generational differences also posed a challenge to planning. The major players at SGM belonged to generations older than the youth on whom the action research study focused; consequently, there were disagreements about the types of programs to be offered—that is, some programs preferred by youth were not supported by their parents or the majority of the congregation.
SGM was also laden with cultural nuances that put pressure on the planning process. The AR team members agreed that punctuality posed a problem to the planning process, as it was typical for SGM congregants to arrive at events at least an hour later than the publicized start time. The need to consult with certain individuals (e.g., elder congregants) who were not relevant to the planning activities was highlighted as another cultural issue prolonging the process. Also, the values placed on education and God by members of SGM were identified as cultural issues impacting the design of youth programs.

Scheduling conflicts with other church programs proved to be detrimental to the planning process, as evidenced by the low turnout for youth programs when parents were scheduled to be at one venue and youth were required to be at another. In such cases, the youth programs were usually considered secondary.

A major external challenge identified in this study was the inflexibility of external partners. Some organizations that had been included in the planning of youth programs at SGM had fixed schedules which could not be changed regardless of SGM’s planned events. Therefore, planners had to work around the availability of those external partners.

**Negotiation of Challenges**

The AR team members at SGM utilized a variety of strategies for negotiating challenges. The team did not have specified leaders because, from the onset of planning, I emphasized the need for equality among members and stressed the fact that I was not the expert on matters. I clearly defined my role as the facilitator who was responsible for bringing together a team of concerned congregants to work to resolve pressing issues. I further explained that I would be responsible for scheduling meetings as agreed by the group, securing meeting space, developing meeting agendas, and transcribing meeting notes. The group was required to lead the
deliberations, since many were versed in youth issues. In addition, the team was educated about the action research methodology and I acted as a gatekeeper of the methodology’s collaborative foundation. For example, if it seemed that a negotiation was one-sided, I would pose strategic questions to involve silent team members who had not made contributions. In some cases, I raised issues for the group’s consideration that might have been overlooked. Consequently, the resolution of most disagreements was spearheaded by the parties that cared the most about the particular issues.

Decisions were made primarily by building a consensus among team members. To build consensus, program planners engaged in interest-based discussions in which all participants had equal voice (in most cases), making sure to focus on the goals of the group. To broaden the support for youth programs within the entire system, program planners liaised with other departments within SGM. The AR team also consulted with key members of SGM’s leadership team in order to alleviate some of the challenges.

The resilience of planners was a unique characteristic which eventually led to the outcomes of the action research project and the engagement of youth. This is congruent with Caffarella’s (2002) description of program planners as individuals who typically have numerous roles, varied backgrounds and experiences, and little or no formal training in program planning, and who oftentimes have to learn by trial and error. Action research team members worked through challenges by being flexible and moving program planning into the creation and implementation phases despite setbacks and complications. In some cases, they exercised creativity in addressing obstacles to reach the goal of inclusive youth engagement. For instance, they learned to plan around church programs to make youth programs highly visible and available—hence the focus of SGM. They also did this to ensure programs’ accessibility to
youth and parents. SGM’s program calendar was considered during planning to ensure that youth programs held on Sundays did not conflict with other church events. Planners explored the idea of hosting youth programs concurrently with regular Sunday church services to avoid placing an extra burden on parents by requiring them to make extra trips to church.

**Changes in Activity that Resulted in Youth Engagement**

Changes in the status quo at SGM were prerequisites for increased youth engagement. The first fundamental change in SGM was the decision to overtly tackle the problem of youth disengagement. Prior to the initiation of the action research project, there had been an awareness of the existence of the problem. Therefore, it was relatively easy for adult congregants to agree on making the issue of youth engagement a focus of the action research project.

Subsequent decisions to hire a youth pastor and to provide funds to augment the youth ministry (which was created by the program plannners) were practical and symbolic commitment of the church leadership to the youth engagement cause. The development and implementation of a year-long calendar of youth programs was another change that resulted in youth engagement. The implemented programs were further evaluated to determine program offerings for the subsequent calendar year, ensuring continuity and sustainability. In order to have better input into the types of activities and discussion topics that were relevant to their needs, program planners invited youth representatives to the planning table.

**Individual, Group, and System Learning**

The action research project also resulted in learning at individual, group, and system levels within SGM. Individual program planners engaged in experiential learning through their work planning youth engagement programs with the team. These learnings included the
importance of allowing volunteers to function in their areas of strength, attentiveness to commitment, patience, team building, and the importance of delegation.

As a group, the team learned to value collaboration in problem-solving and gained an understanding of the action research approach. Individuals in the team took the skills, knowledge, and experience they garnered on the AR project to their roles in other SGM committees.

At the system level, several AR team members and key stakeholders—namely, the youth pastor and the pastor—all asserted that the youth engagement initiative and its sustainability have energized the church and inspired more congregants to become involved with volunteering in SGM.

Conclusions and Discussion

Four conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this AR case study. The first three conclusions relate directly to the AR process, while the fourth focuses on youth engagement. Specifically, the first three conclusions address concepts that can facilitate program planning, while the fourth identifies organizational changes that can facilitate youth engagement. A discussion of each conclusion follows.

Conclusion 1: Negotiation of Culture and Power is Required at the Planning Table and Is Critical for a Successful Intervention

Cervero and Wilson (2006) refer to negotiation as the action that takes place at the planning tables where people confer, discuss, and argue in making judgments about how to produce important program features. The authors further highlight five key areas of the program toward which this negotiation should be geared: (1) needs-assessment; (2) educational,
management, and political objectives; (3) instructional design and implementation; (4) administrative organization and operation; and (5) formal and informal evaluation.

This action research case study showed that organizational culture is an additional key area in which the SGM planners had to negotiate as they planned youth programs. The findings from this study identified the disregard for punctuality, the need to consult with individuals who were not pertinent to the project, and the focus on two fundamental values (i.e., education and God) as key cultural traits in SGM. Moreover, the great disparity between the perception of equal voice among AR team members and my experience facilitating the AR process in the midst of power relations may be due to the value that the Nigerian culture places on respect and religion. Religious leaders are therefore accorded great respect, which makes followers defer to their judgements without questioning.

Of course, the effect of culture on program planning is not groundbreaking. In their study to explore the causal links between personal and organizational interests of adult educators, Mills, Cervero, Langone, and Wilson (1995) found that organizational culture was one of the factors that either enabled or constrained county agents’ planning practices. Similarly, Caffarella (2002) argued that program planning is affected by cultural factors, which “incorporate the history and traditions of the organization, organizational beliefs and values, and organizational rituals, stories, symbols, and heroes” (p. 63).

Scholars agree that power influences the planning process (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Forester, 1989), and power shapes needs, sets agenda, and allocates resources (Caffarella, 2002). This was also the case at SGM. An example of how power allocates resources occurred during the planning at SGM when the AR team needed to hire an external consultant to train the newly recruited mentors. The pastor was out of the country, and since the
assistant pastor was unable to authorize the activity, the team had to wait until the pastor’s return. Because of this delay, the plan was eventually foiled.

Power has been defined as the capacity to act (Apple, 1992). Power is possessed by people whose capacity to act is dependent on the specific socially structured relationship (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). The AR project involved individuals with varying levels of power as a result of their position within SGM, and their choice to use or not use their power impacted the process of program planning. Despite the effect of power, many AR team members stated in their critical incident interviews that they perceived equality among planners. Conversely, I observed blatant exercises of power. SGM’s status as a faith-based organization could affect how members view the exertion of power in this context. It is possible that congregants refused to acknowledge the presence of power to avoid being viewed as rebellious, a trait that is discouraged in this context.

The negotiation of power and the cultural factors unique to SGM was exemplified by the planners making “just-in-time” cultural accommodations and liaising with the key power players. That is, we were able to recognize and account for “African time,” consult with some parties in the organization, and ensure that programs encompassed the educational and spiritual components which were hallmarks of the SGM culture. These accommodations were central to the planning, development, and implementation of programs that resulted in increased youth engagement.

**Conclusion 2: Tenets from Interest-Based Negotiation Can be Utilized to Overcome Disagreements in Program Planning and Advance Decision Making**

Negotiations evidenced during the program planning phase of this study were consistent with Fisher and Ury’s (1981) model of negotiation, originally called interest-based negotiation
and later renamed principled negotiation. Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011) assert that principled negotiation is efficient, improves, or at least does not damage, the relationship between the parties, and produces a “wise agreement.” The authors further define a wise agreement as “one that meets the legitimate interest of each side to the extent possible, resolves conflicting interests fairly, is durable, and takes community interests into account” (Fisher et al., 2011, p. 4).

Tenets from principled negotiation were applied by the planners to various aspects of this action research case study. Interview data found repeatedly that disagreements were resolved among program planners by focusing on the interest of the youth whom they served. Planners asserted that there were arguments but no major conflicts within the team because all members were working toward a similar goal. Disagreements that did arise were resolved by talking through issues, weighing the pros and cons of different options, and selecting the best option to meet the interests of the youth. Team members also identified engagement in respectful discourse as a practice that upheld the relationship of the group.

Figure 4 illustrates four different types of thinking, each of which represents a step in the process of creating options during disagreements (Fisher et al., 2011): (1) think about a particular problem; (2) descriptive analysis—diagnose an existing situation in general terms; (3) consider what ought, perhaps, to be done; and (4) come up with some specific and feasible suggestions for action (p. 68).
In the real world of action research conducted at SGM, the steps in Figure 4 were not always followed rigidly. Although the highlighted steps provided a framework for deliberations, Figure 5 provides a more accurate depiction of how the action team “talked through” disagreements and collaboratively built consensus amenable to all members and aligned with the interest of the youth. Fisher, Ury and Paton’s (2011) circle chart is broad and begins with the assumption that there is generally recognized problem. However Figure 5 is context specific and indicates that negotiations usually began with team members presenting differing views about an issue. Thus, the disagreeing parties were given the opportunity of defend their stands. Next, because the focus

Figure 4. Fisher, Ury, and Paton (2011) Circle Chart.
of the team is identified as youth engagement in SGM, the team compares the various arguments to the interests of the youth. Last, the team chooses the idea that is most feasible for the youth and the context.

![Diagram of Action Research Team’s Decision-Making Process]

*Figure 5. Illustration of Action Research Team’s Decision-Making Process.*

One major area of difference between the circle chart and the AR team’s decision-making process is the call by Fisher and Ury (2011) for negotiators to explore approaches that theory may suggest as they work to invent options to resolve a dispute. This step within the circle chart was not implemented in the AR process because of team members’ different skill levels and experiences. In a situation such as this where congregants with different educational backgrounds collaborate to initiate change, the use of theoretical models for problem solving was
impractical. Team members were quick to defer to life experiences as sources for creating options as opposed to theoretical constructs. Furthermore, when operating under time constraints, it is difficult to stop and conduct research before deciding on the way to proceed. Consequently, the party with the best argument was usually able to sway the group.

This final suggestion of the circle chart is to devise specific and feasible suggestions for action. This coincided with the AR team’s final step. The need to balance interest and feasibility in the planning process cannot be overemphasized. As this AR team worked to plan, implement, and evaluate programs within SGM, it became apparent that not all the programs that were in the best interest of the youth could be implemented. Various factors such as parental support, available resources, and time (among others) made it impossible to intervene in all the areas that were beneficial to the youth. It is therefore essential that program planners identify and find a balance between what is feasible and what is in the best interest of the program recipients. Principles from interest-based negotiation should also be adapted to the particular context and issues.

**Conclusion 3: Engaging in the Action Research Process Can Promote Action Learning at the Individual, Group, and System Levels**

Scholars agree that learning is one of the outcomes of action research. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2010), “One result of action research is action learning, which is an approach to the development of people in organizations, which takes the task as the vehicle for learning” (p. 45). This learning should be evaluated as the team is engaging in the project. Argyris (2003) also posits that the inquiry into the steps of the action research process itself is the key to developing actionable knowledge. The results of this study provide empirical
evidence that action research results in learning as participants identified various perspectives they gained from working on the project.

A secondary goal of this action research project was for AR team members to learn, leading ultimately to organizational learning for SGM as a whole. Senge (2006) argues that individual learning is one avenue for organizational learning. This action research study also found that learning at different levels of SGM was an outcome of the process, and members expressed their intention to apply the acquired knowledge in the future. This learning could be transferred to other parts of SGM, as team members align with other congregants to work on other projects within the organization. Therefore, action research is a methodology that can help to generate knowledge in individuals, groups, and possibly organizations while concurrently working to resolve pertinent organizational issues.

**Conclusion 4: Youth Program Planning Is Dependent on Corresponding Changes in Other Parts of the Faith-Based Organization**

Systems are a collection of parts which interact and function as a whole (Ackoff & Rovin, 2003). SGM is one such system, and the youth ministry which was created by this action research project is a part of the system. According to Senge (2006), systems thinking requires seeing interrelationships, and within the context of systems change, “system” refers to the actors, activities, and settings that are directly or indirectly perceived to influence or be affected by a particular situation (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). Therefore, to fully understand the dynamics of this program planning effort, it was crucial to consider SGM as a whole and identify other parts of SGM that directly or indirectly affect the youth. This study found that the success of youth engagement efforts was dependent on other parts of SGM, such as the church leadership, the
finance department, parents, young adults who served as mentors, and generally the rest of the congregation.

The increase in youth engagement in SGM through the efforts of the AR interventions was dependent on the willingness of church leaders to take the project seriously and inject the necessary resources. Conversely, the main reason for the failure of one of the interventions—the planned mentoring program—was the lack of human resources to adequately sustain the initiative. This outcome is congruent with Foster-Fishman et al.’s (2007) claim that “Current understandings of systems highlight that most systems contain a complex web of interdependent parts: leveraging change in one part will lead to the desired outcome only if concurrent shifts happen in the relational and compositional elements of the entire system” (199). It was important for planners to recognize how their programs were interdependent with other parts of a larger system which needed to work in order to effect sustainable change.

Implications for Practice

This action research study produced implications for program planning practitioners and volunteers in faith-based organizations. These included attentiveness to commitment and the population at the planning table, inclusion of youth and parents in planning, and the replication of results in other parts of the system. Each implication is discussed in the following section.

Attentiveness to Commitment and Population at the Planning Table

Commitment is a necessary ingredient for completing a project. It takes a decision to begin a change initiative, but commitment and the unwavering desire to succeed on the part of stakeholders sustain the project. Commitment cannot be measured objectively, and its absence is not usually disclosed openly. None of the stakeholders in SGM declared they were uncommitted to the cause; rather, others inferred commitment levels by the actions or inactions of individuals
or groups. In this case, the AR team believed that the church leadership was committed due to its willingness to initiate the project, minimal interference with the AR team’s activities, and provision of the needed financial and human resources to support the effort. Conversely, the mentors who were recruited to guide the youth as part of the initiatives made little connection with the teenagers and were unresponsive to program invitations from the AR team. To this end, they were considered uncommitted, and their unresponsiveness eventually led to the failure of that initiative.

As stated earlier, the measurement of commitment is subjective. It is difficult therefore to ascertain that a lack of commitment led to the unresponsiveness of mentors or that commitment caused the church leadership to provide resources in support of the action research project. After all, the project did not measure what motivated different individuals to act in certain ways regarding the youth engagement program planning. One interviewee, while acknowledging the failure of the mentoring program to engage youth, also noted that the lack of success may have been because most of the mentors were young adults who were in or just finishing college. Many have since gone away to graduate school, secured jobs outside the city, or gotten married and stopped attending SGM. The transient nature of this group, she argued, may account for the unresponsiveness. In this case, the participant indicated that the mentors could have been committed but that life situations may have made them unavailable to continue in the guidance role. Likewise, it is possible that the church leaders supported the youth ministry out of obligation and not commitment. Because a majority of the congregation supported the need to work on engaging the youth, the church leaders may have provided the needed resources to avoid a backlash from the congregants rather than out of true concern for youth issues. Therefore, although interviewees identified commitment as a challenge with planning, it is
difficult to ascertain whether the symptoms of a lack or presence of commitment were actually signs of other underlying factors.

The team also stressed the importance of “getting the right people on the bus.” They agreed that the onus was on the facilitator of an action research team to be attentive to individuals in the early stages and “cut out the dead weight.” According to Netting et al. (2008), “the idea is to get the right people in the room—those whose presence is critical for doing the job” (p. 23). The initial invitation and selection of program planners—especially those committed to collaborative planning—is important. There is a need to find a balance between Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) call for representation of all stakeholders at the planning table and the reality that the presence of too many people may stifle the planning work. Along these lines, Moses, an AR team member, noted that “Whenever you are having a meeting only the minimum number of people necessary should be there. This moves things along faster, brings about less arguments, and reduces the number of people needing to be carried along.”

Consequently, program planners should identify and invite to the planning table an ideal mix of committed stakeholders who are representative of those affected by the change initiative. Moreover, it is crucial for stakeholders to decide when and how opportunities for input will be managed and balanced with the need for action. Action research facilitators should also incorporate a system for assessing underlying factors that may mitigate participant commitment and work to address them or make arrangements.

Moreover, the size of the planning table should not to be so large that it becomes detrimental to the planning process. In cases where large numbers of stakeholders are involved, planning may be divided into phases; likewise, stakeholders can be divided into subgroups. Each
phase can be tackled by a subgroup, and representatives of each subgroup can collaborate to finalize the work.

**Inclusion of Youth and Parents in Planning**

Many AR team members emphasized the importance of including youth and their parents in planning. It was understood that whenever parents were in agreement with the programs offered by the youth ministry, the likelihood of youth participation increased. Therefore, it was important for planners to find creative ways to recruit parents onto the planning team and communicate proposals to parents to solicit feedback.

Similarly, the need to have the youth at the planning table rather than settle for secondhand feedback was also discussed. As SGM continues to sustain the youth program planning work that was initiated by this action research project, the two youth classes (13- to 14-year-olds and 15- to 18-year-olds) were asked to elect two representatives from each group as members of the planning team. This gave the planning team a deeper awareness of the needs of the youth and also allowed the youth to be privy to the work of program planning. Furthermore, it helped to develop leadership skills in the youth representatives. It is recommended that planners work to ensure that all views that are pertinent to planning are represented at the planning table. Systems should be put in place to provide an equal voice for those who are directly impacted by a change effort.

**Change Other Parts of the System to Accommodate and Sustain Change Effort**

This project showed the importance of making compensatory changes in other parts of a system to ensure the sustainability of a change effort. SGM, like many organizations, is made up of several parts which are intrinsically linked. Therefore, for the system to advance, all its parts must do the same.
The AR team, as well as the leadership of SGM, understood that the results from this action research study could only be sustained if there were similar changes in other parts of SGM. For this reason, the leadership made complimentary changes by including the youth ministry into the church’s budget and worked with other departments to provide space and equipment for the youth to hold their services. Similarly, almost every department in SGM had to make logistical changes in order to accommodate the newly created youth ministry and its programs.

Ignoring the effect that the failure of other parts of the system could have would be harmful to the youth ministry itself. In a case like SGM, where negative experiences of planning in the context caused the planners to exhibit skepticism in the early stages of planning, there was even more of a need to ensure sustainability by addressing the interconnectedness of the various parts of the organization. To this end, it is suggested that organizations seeking sustainable change should first understand and assess the potential impact on other areas of the establishment. A change initiative should not be embarked upon if the other parts of the organization are unable to make the necessary accommodations.

**Implications for Theory**

In addition to contributing to practical knowledge, this study built on several prior studies in systems theory, negotiation theory, and program planning theory. Findings from this study concurred with most of the empirical studies highlighted; however, in some cases, the same variables were not measured, concurred only partially, or were not relevant. In general, the study agreed with other studies in that negotiations were involved in program planning, but the types of negotiations varied somewhat. In alignment with one of the previous studies, this study noted the need for patience in leading change efforts. The sense of ownership that accompanies
involvement was demonstrated in the study, and challenges to planning were also noted. Table
14 revisits the empirical studies related to these theories to outline this study’s level of agreement
with their findings. This may advance discussion among scholars or inspire further research to
increase the knowledge base in these fields.

Table 14

Selected Empirical Studies Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Concurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnette, 2010</td>
<td>To examine the strategies employed by program administrators in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as they negotiate sociopolitical interests in developing programs using the Cervero and Wilson (2006) framework for program planning.</td>
<td>Continuing higher education administrators negotiate power and influence within HBCUs by networking among peers and colleagues, finding common interests, and creating parallel structures.</td>
<td>Concur – AR team members negotiated among themselves and other power structures within SGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westfall-Rudd, 2011</td>
<td>To examine and document teacher participation in continuing professional education planning based on Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) adult planning theory.</td>
<td>When the teachers took primary responsibility for planning their own professional development, they seemed to assume an increased sense of ownership for practice of their profession.</td>
<td>Concur – When youth’s opinion was sought and some representatives later invited to join the planning committee, they took ownership for their programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Concurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendricks, 2001</td>
<td>To study the relationship between contextual factors, individual factors, and the use of influencing tactics in adult education planning situations. The study tested the theoretical relationships between variables that have been suggested by Cervero and Wilson (1994a).</td>
<td>Low levels of conflict, indicative of consensus, were associated with reasoning and consulting. This finding was consistent with the theoretical position of Cervero and Wilson (1994a).</td>
<td>Concur – There was a low level of disagreement among AR team members due to the common goal. Reasoning and consulting among team members and church leadership were the primary negotiation strategies employed in the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. J. Watkins &amp; Tisdell, 2006</td>
<td>To examine how adult degree program administrators negotiate power and interests in the constantly shifting landscape of adult education. The Cervero and Wilson (2006) program planning model was one of the frameworks used to ground the study.</td>
<td>Adult degree program planners negotiate power and interest by: moving the institutional interest in adult learners from the margins closer to the center; gaining influence by drawing on multiple forms of capital; building a bridge of common interests among key players as a way of leveraging power; and balancing institutional expectations for growth with resource allocation.</td>
<td>Concur – AR team negotiated power and interest by strategically planning youth programs on dates that did not conflict with other church programs to enable SGM focus on youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senger, 2002</td>
<td>To assess how interest-based negotiation, as popularized by Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991), works in different cultural contexts around the world.</td>
<td>Interest-based negotiation is extremely valuable in many cases and less relevant in others. Overall, it is a useful framework for analyzing negotiation and provides helpful tools for approaching most situations.</td>
<td>Concur – Interest based negotiation advanced decision making in this project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Concurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booth &amp; McCredie, 2004</td>
<td>To examine Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida’s (BCBSF’s) attempt to indoctrinate Fisher and Ury’s (1991) principles of interest-based negotiation throughout the entire organization, after one BCBSF’s alliance group began to experience positive outcomes by applying the concepts.</td>
<td>The company’s general experience was that concepts came more naturally at the executive stratégic level and required more deliberation at subsequent levels.</td>
<td>Did not measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford, 2007</td>
<td>Action research case study that describes a transformational change effort to make a police department into a learning organization by becoming a community policing organization. The purpose of the change effort was build capacity to sustain change efforts and instill system thinking into the mindset of members of the organization.</td>
<td>Effective leaders must have the patience to constantly build capacity for change among organizational members throughout the various stages of the change effort.</td>
<td>Concur – Part of the learnings identified by AR team members in this study was the need for patience as change cannot be effected overnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suarez-Balcazar et.al, 2007</td>
<td>Illustrates efforts toward systems change in the luncheon program and food vending machines in the Chicago public schools using the social ecological model and the soft systems methodology.</td>
<td>Critical antecedents that lead to change and challenges to change effort were identified.</td>
<td>Concur – Through this research, AR team and church leadership were able to identify areas of SGM that needed to change to accommodate the youth engagement effort.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to contributing to scholarly knowledge, this study also generated additional questions for future study. The recommendations in this section are geared toward advancing the fields of program planning and action research. The recommendations include: investigating the validity of the study by varying the context; exploring the commitment of volunteers; examining the definition of power within faith-based organizations; and probing the effect of insider researcher on the critical interview data.

**Varying the Context**

This study was conducted in an ethnic faith-based organization to understand the dynamics of program planning for youth. It would be illustrative to conduct a similar study in another faith-based organization, possibly one that caters to the mainstream population or an immigrant faith-based organization serving another ethnic group (not Nigerians) to determine whether similar results will be reached. This will enable researchers to delineate whether the specific immigrant origin accounted for the results of the study. Such an investigation will lend more credence to this study and possibly determine whether the results from this study are generalizable or context-specific.

**Exploring the Commitment of Volunteers**

This study involved a group of volunteers, and the issue of commitment was raised throughout the project. Some volunteers who attended meetings or indicated a desire to contribute failed continuously to deliver on their promises, supposedly because they lacked commitment. Another area of potential research would be to draw more heavily on the volunteer motivation literature and investigate what leads volunteers to commit to one cause over another--particularly in faith-based organizations.
During the critical incident exit interviews for this study, one action research team member, in response to a question about what he would have done differently if he had the chance, said, “Personally, I would have encouraged people. When we started, we were so many, but with time some people stopped showing up for different reasons. I would like to know why all those people stopped showing up.” His assertion supports this recommendation for future study.

**Examining the Definition of Power within Faith-Based Organizations**

Power has been defined as the ability to control and influence others (Zaleznik & Kets de Vries, 1975). This action research project raises the question of what constitutes power in a faith-based organization and who holds it. Although AR team members did not note in their critical incident interviews any issues with or perceptions of power during the planning process or within the culture of SGM, I, as the principal researcher, observed deference to positional power in the meetings that the pastor’s wife attended. This deference was evidenced by the willingness of team members to quickly adopt her suggestion to begin a youth church without much debate. The speed at which this suggestion was implemented—as compared to the other interventions—made me question the role of power in that interaction. The pastor’s wife did not have to yield the power; team members just seemed to ascribe it to her. According to Stimson and Appelbaum (1988), “positional power draws on one’s position in the organizational structure as its primary source and tends to be hierarchical in nature” (p. 314). The pastor’s wife at SGM enjoyed positional power as the spouse of the individual at the helm of affairs and also as an assistant pastor.

Attending to power in planning is essential, as asserted by Forester (1989): “If planners ignore those in power, they assure their own powerlessness. Alternatively, if planners understand
how relations of power shape the planning process, they can improve the quality of their analyses” (p. 27). During and after the exit interviews, I questioned whether interviewees had forgotten certain critical events because of the timeline between their occurrence and the interviews, or whether positional power in faith-based organization was such a norm that nobody noticed its exertion. Whatever the answer, it would be significant to study the perception of power held by congregants in faith-based organizations and its relationship to the literature on power in program planning.

The Effect of Insider Action Researcher Role on Critical Incident Interview Data

This recommendation was borne out of my experience conducting critical incident exit interviews with action research team members. Critical incident interviews are aimed at capturing the details of participants’ behaviors in a specific situation (Victoroff & Hogan, 2006). However, regarding the team members of the action research study, I believed they were not detailed enough in their interviews. They would begin to discuss an event, only to leave out some information and say, “Well, you were there, and you know what happened.” Attempts to probe them to be more forthcoming were futile as they thought the information was redundant. Consequently, a study which compares the critical incident interview data that were collected by an insider to that collected by an outsider would expand the knowledge base around best practices when utilizing critical incident interviewing.

Conclusion

This research project addressed the need for SGM to be more effective in the engagement of its youth membership (aged 13-18 years old) by working with a team of concerned congregants to develop youth-focused programs. Results from the AR project indicate that SGM experienced increased youth engagement and a revitalization of the entire church as a result of
the work. This study further identified the challenges to planning, implementing, and evaluating youth engagement programs in a faith-based organization as well as how the challenges were negotiated during the program planning process. It also examined the changes within a faith-based organization that resulted in youth engagement and the learning that took place on individual, group, and system levels. The opportunity to reflect on actions identified ways in which team members had grown through the process and how they came to value teamwork and the action research approach to planning and problem-solving. Participants discussed their desire to see the adoption of the action research process in other parts of the organization and speculated on their plans to utilize the knowledge gained in their future endeavors.

Findings also suggest that program planners were able to engage youth because they had in-depth knowledge of the context and were committed to the goal of youth engagement. Consequently, they continued to forge ahead in spite of challenges. The support of church leadership in the collaborative process of problem identification involving all congregants was critical in creating and maintaining the sense of urgency needed to address the issue of youth engagement. Finally, action research methodology, negotiation theory, systems change theory, and program planning theory were all viable lens for this study.

As faith-based organizations continue to reinvent themselves to be more appealing to a diverse group of congregants, particularly the next generation of congregants, the importance of collaborative program planning cannot be overemphasized. The learning that takes place in these microcosms can be instrumental for building capacity and to positioning faith-based organizations as systems that are capable of continuous transformation in order meet the ever-changing needs of the populations they serve.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1177/0193723501253005


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT SAMPLE

I, ____________________________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled “Design and Implementation of Youth Development Initiatives in an Immigrant Church: Utilizing A Participatory Approach” conducted by Yetunde Alade from the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Lorilee Sandmann, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to develop, implement, and evaluate initiatives that are geared towards the spiritual and educational development of the youth in the church. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. Serve as a member of an action research group to plan, implement, and evaluate identified initiatives
2. Participate in an open-ended interview session to identify critical learning at the end of the project. The interview session will be recorded, and will last for an hour.

The benefit for me is that the future of my church may be better secured by the development of the youth. Today's youth are the future generation, who will continue the vision and mission of the church. I also hope to learn more about the organizational dynamics of a church.

There are no foreseen risks for participation in this study.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care), or if required by law. The audio recording of my interview session will be transcribed, and then destroyed to eliminate the possibility that I can be identified.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.
Name of Researcher __________________ Signature __________________ Date __________________

Telephone:_____________________________________

Email:_________________________________________

Name of Participant __________________ Signature __________________ Date __________________

Please, sign both copies, keep one, and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your insights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Studies, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; Email Address IRB@uga.edu
### APPENDIX B

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY**

The questionnaire below is being administered to determine the needs of RCCG-FPC, which may become the focus of an Action Research Study. The study will be conducted by Mrs. Yetunde Alade under the direction of Dr. Khalil Dirani, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, University of Georgia.

Participation is voluntary and anonymous. However, by completing this survey, you are consenting to the use of the information you provide as a part of the research study. You may contact Mrs. Yetunde Alade if you have any question regarding this questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A - Listed below is a series of statements that represent different needs of RCCG-FPC. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the five alternatives next to each statement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of agreement:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1. In RCCG-FPC, new member retention should be a priority |
| 2. RCCG-FPC should focus on church diversification to be inclusive of non-Nigerians |
| 3. RCCG-FPC should develop systems to assist new immigrant members with adjusting (acculturation) to the American society |
| 4. RCCG-FPC, should focus on the bridging of the generational and cultural gap between members |
| 5. RCCG-FPC should focus on meeting the social needs of the neighboring community (through the creation of a food pantry, clothes drive, etc.) |
| 6. RCCG-FPC’s mission and vision statements should be re-assessed and revised to ensure relevance with current needs |
| 7. Church activities should be closely aligned with RCCG-FPC’s vision and mission statements |
| 8. The motivation and engagement of women to participate in programs, meetings, and outreaches organized by the women’s fellowship should be a focus of RCCG-FPC |
| 9. RCCG-FPC needs to support its youth and teenagers by offering educational activities (tutoring, homework assistance, etc.) |

*Please turn over*
10. RCCG-FPC should focus on adequately preparing its youth and teenagers for the pressures of college life.

11. The recruiting and retaining of “singles” should be a focus of RCCG-FPC.

12. RCCG-FPC should explore and address the needs of “older singles” (divorcees, widows, and over 40yrs but never married).

13. Please indicate any other concerns within RCCG-FPC that you will like to see resolved:

---

### Section B

Please answer the following demographic questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Gender:</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>2. Age:</th>
<th>________________ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Citizenship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Total years of attending this church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Total years of living in the USA:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Highest level of education completed:</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Two year degree</td>
<td>Four year degree</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How many hours per week of your personal time do you spend on Church-related activities?</td>
<td>No hours</td>
<td>less then 5 hours</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>11-20 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**
APPENDIX C
RESEARCHER REFLECTION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Opening Script

Thank you once again for your willingness to participate in this study. My name is Yetunde Alade and I am a graduate student at the University of Georgia, conducting an action research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Adult Education. The study focuses on the program planning to engage youth in The Redeemed Christian Church of God – Family Praise Chapel (RCCG-FPC).

Thank you for being a part of the action research team and agreeing to take part in this semi-structured mid-point interview to determine your views about the current state of the project. The interview session is scheduled for 60 mins. and will include 8 questions regarding your critical learning experiences during the study. I am requesting your permission to audio tape this interview; to enable me document the information you provide accurately.

As indicated on your signed consent form, your participation is completely voluntary. Please inform me if you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview at any time. All your responses are confidential and will be used as part of the study. The audio recording of this session will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.

I will be happy to answer any questions or provide further clarification that you may require at this time. With your permission we will begin the interview.
Interview Questions

1. What is your name and why are you concerned about RCCG-FPCs youth?

2. What have you learned from working with other individuals to develop and implement youth programs in the church?

3. In what ways, if any does the immigrant nature of the church affect program planning?

4. How effective do you think the various initiatives (youth services, mentoring program, college visit, evangelism) are in achieving the stated goals of spiritual and educational development?

5. From your previous and current experience with this team, what are the challenges of effectively planning and implementing youth programs in RCCG-FPC?

6. What systems does the church need to ensure sustainability of youth development initiatives?

7. What changes do you think that the church has to make in order to effectively engage the youth?

8. What suggestions do you have on improving the process of implementing and evaluating the current programs?

Closing Script

We have come to the end of this interview session. Thank you once again for your time.
APPENDIX D
CRITICAL INCIDENT EXIT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Opening Script

Thank you once again for your willingness to participate in this study. My name is Yetunde Alade and I am a graduate student at the University of Georgia, conducting an action research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Adult Education. The study focuses on the program planning to engage youth in The Redeemed Christian Church of God – Family Praise Chapel (RCCG-FPC).

Thank you for being a part of the action research team and agreeing to take part in this follow-up interview. The interview session is scheduled for 60 – 90mins and will include 10 questions regarding your critical learning experiences during the study. I am requesting your permission to audio tape this interview; to enable me document the information you provide accurately.

As indicated on your signed consent form, your participation is completely voluntary. Please inform me if you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview at any time. All your responses are confidential and will be used as part of the study. The audio recording of this session will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.

I will be happy to answer any questions or provide further clarification that you may require at this time. With your permission we will begin the interview.
**Interview Questions**

1. When you think about your experience in the Action Research Process of working with others to plan, implement and evaluate youth programs, what was the most significant incident or turning point in the project? Describe for me:
   
a) What happened?
   
b) Who was involved?
   
c) What you and others said or did?
   
d) What about the incident made it critical?
   
e) Can you think of another incident?

2. As you think back over the planning, implementation and evaluation processes and the interaction of our team,
   
a) How would you say our group came to its decisions?
   
b) Whose opinions or voices seemed to matter?
   
c) How were differences of opinion or conflicts treated?
   
d) How were they resolved (if they were)?
   
e) Were our processes and decision making influenced by information from other pertinent members of the church beyond our group?

3. Were there variations in activities that were planned and what was actually implemented?
   
   If so,
   
a) What changed?
   
b) What factors led to the decision to change?
   
c) How did the group decide on the change?
   
d) How were conflicts about the change treated (if they existed)?
4. What interests (if any) did you seek to promote by working on this project?

5. How did the final outcome of the project align with or differ from your expectations?

6. What knowledge and insight have you gained or learned during this project?

7. In what ways will you apply the knowledge and insight you gained from this study in the future?

8. Based on what you now know, what would you have done differently if you had the opportunity?

9. What recommendations do you have for any other organization that is trying to accomplish a similar goal?

10. What other pertinent information regarding your personal experience and the group experience do you want me to capture?

**Closing Script**

We have come to the end of this interview session. Thank you once again for your time.
APPENDIX E

EVENTS TIMELINE FOR CONSTRUCTION PHASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 28, 2012</td>
<td>Met with church pastor</td>
<td>Request the use of the church as a research context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 5, 2012</td>
<td>Met with church leadership team (pastor, assistant pastor,</td>
<td>Provide an overview of action research methodology and create awareness for research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and deacons)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 6, 2013</td>
<td>Needs assessment meeting</td>
<td>Brainstorm about areas in the church that could benefit from action research methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 2013</td>
<td>Pilot testing of needs assessment survey</td>
<td>Determine the ease of completion of survey and gather additional feedback on the survey instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3, 2013</td>
<td>Needs assessment survey administration</td>
<td>Gather input from entire church congregants on an action research focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 17, 2013</td>
<td>Review of survey results</td>
<td>Identify the action research focus, based on survey results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>99</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Items are grouped by color scheme from highest priority to lowest priority

Color coding:

- **Dark gray** – highest priority items (10, 1, and 9): Respondents believed that these items mattered most to them and to the church. These items included the provision of educational activities and preparation of youth and teenagers for the pressures of college life. New member retention was also in this group.

- **Light gray** – medium priority items (2, 4, 5, and 12): Respondents believed that these items mattered to a high degree but not as high as those in the dark gray group. These items included church diversification, bridging generational and cultural gaps, meeting social needs, and addressing the needs of older singles.

- **Lighter gray** – low priority items (3, 7, and 11): Respondents believed that these items mattered, but not as much as the items above. These items included member acculturation, realignment of church vision and mission, and the recruitment and retention of singles.

- **Lightest gray** – very low priority item (8): Respondents thought that this item (motivation and engagement of women’s fellowship members) was of low importance compared to the other items.

- **White** – least priority item (6): Respondents thought the least of this item – revision of mission and vision of the church.
## APPENDIX G

### SUMMARY OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION MEETINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting/Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2, 2014</td>
<td>Assign roles to youth for inaugural service</td>
<td>Selected youth were assigned to roles such as choir, usher, preacher, prayer leader, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 9, 2014</td>
<td>Check in with youth to assess preparation and provide support for assigned roles; set up room for service</td>
<td>Provided pointers to youth on how to carry out role and ascertained readiness for inaugural service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 16, 2014</td>
<td>Oversee youth inaugural service</td>
<td>Successful event; youth want more frequent services; no mentors attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30, 2014</td>
<td>To review mentor and mentee profiles and match them accordingly</td>
<td>Matched all mentors and mentees who had complete documentation; some mentors assigned more than one mentee to some mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6, 2014</td>
<td>Mentor training to provide mentors with an overview of mentoring program and expectation</td>
<td>Provided a good foundation for mentors to begin in their role; only 8 of 15 mentors attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 13, 2014</td>
<td>Delegate tasks and logistics for Spring Fling</td>
<td>Mary and Moses – Games; Martha – Food; Researcher – other tasks as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 19, 2014</td>
<td>Spring Fling—social event to introduce mentors to mentees and a forum for breaking the ice</td>
<td>About 30 youth attended and 5 mentors; most youth could not meet their mentors; group team building activities conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 4, 2014</td>
<td>Delegate mentor check-in and assign tasks for second youth service</td>
<td>Assigned Moses, Mary, Martha and myself 3-4 mentor/mentee pairs to check in with; adults to facilitate upcoming youth service because of time crunch to prepare youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting/Activity</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18, 2014</td>
<td>Oversaw second youth service</td>
<td>Youth were distracted because they were not involved in facilitation; more mentors attended; not enough room for all attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6, 2014</td>
<td>Debrief pastor on AR progress and some recommendations from AR team</td>
<td>Focus on creating a permanent space for youth; amend church vacancy to include the role of youth pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 15, 2014</td>
<td>Meeting with youth to begin planning for youth day</td>
<td>Youth agreed that they were not ready; developed a plan for meeting every Sunday to prepare for event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 22, 2014</td>
<td>Worked with youth to develop youth day agenda; assigned roles</td>
<td>Draft agenda for youth day; decided that youth will need to shadow in different departments as they practiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29, 2014</td>
<td>Preparation for youth day</td>
<td>Youth practiced roles and got assignments on what to work on during the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6, 2014</td>
<td>Preparation for youth day</td>
<td>Mock service conducted by youth as a final practice for the following Sunday’s youth day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 13, 2014</td>
<td>Youth day</td>
<td>Successful event; parents and all congregants were proud of the performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 20, 2014</td>
<td>Reflect on youth day and discuss logistics and tasks for Back to School social</td>
<td>Identified strengths and areas of opportunity of youth day and delegated tasks related to Back to School social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2, 2014</td>
<td>Back to School social</td>
<td>Mentors and AR team members provided one on one tips to youth as they prepared for a new school year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 17, 2014</td>
<td>Youth Service</td>
<td>Spiritual development for youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 11, 2014</td>
<td>College Tour</td>
<td>Exposure to requirements and college environment at Georgia Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 22, 2014</td>
<td>Etiquette Dinner</td>
<td>Youth received training and illustration on social and business etiquette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 6, 2014</td>
<td>World Hunger Workshop</td>
<td>Provided information on needs around the world and how youth can make a positive impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION SURVEY – YOUTH COPY

The purpose of this survey is to assess the effectiveness of the youth programs for 2014. These inputs will become the basis for the 2015 program planning.

Section 1: For each of the programs listed below, indicate which programs you attended. If you did not attend, briefly explain your absence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Attended</th>
<th>Did Not Attend</th>
<th>Reason for Not Attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Fling/Know your mentor</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Evangelism Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Debate and Bible Trivia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth/Mentor Back to School Social (beach)</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Tour and Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentoring Program</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Section 2: For each of the programs listed below, indicate the level of relevance to you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Very Relevant</th>
<th>Relevant</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Irrelevant</th>
<th>Very Irrelevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Very Relevant</td>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Very Irrelevant</td>
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<td>College Tour and Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Stewardship/Volunteering Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Dinner and Movie Night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentoring Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toys/Clothes Drive</td>
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</table>

**Section 3: Please respond to the following questions:**

1. What is your sex? Male _________ Female ____________
2. How old are you? ___________
3. What is your grade level? ___________
4. How long have you attended this church? ______________
5. Have you been engaged by the programs offered this year? Yes _______ No _______
6. Which of the program you attended was your favorite? _______________________
7. What about the program selected in #7 made it your favorite?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
8. What activities would you like to see the youth department offer?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
9. What factors would you like the youth program planners to consider as programs are planned?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
10. What activities would you like to see the youth department discontinue?
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________

Would you like to be a part of the youth program planning committee? Yes ___ No ___
APPENDIX I

YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAM PLANNING SURVEY – ADULT COPY

The purpose of this survey is to assess the effectiveness of the youth programs for 2014 and solicit the input of all church members in youth program planning for the upcoming year (2015).

Section 1: For each of the programs listed below, indicate your perceived level of relevance to youth (13-18yrs old):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Very Relevant</th>
<th>Relevant</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Irrelevant</th>
<th>Very Irrelevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Services</td>
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<td>College Tour and Planning</td>
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<td>Youth Volunteering Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toys/Clothes Drive</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 2: Please respond to the following questions:
1. How long have you attended this church? ______________
2. Are you aware of the church’s efforts to enhance youth engagement? Yes ___No ____
3. What activities would you like the youth department to offer?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. What factors would you like the youth program planners to consider as programs are planned?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. What activities would you like to see the youth department discontinue?
________________________________________________________________________

6. Would you like to be a part of the youth program planning committee? Yes ___No ____

Section 3: For Parents/Guardians of Teenagers Only

A. For each of the programs listed below, indicate whether or not your child attended. If your child did not attend, briefly explain his/her absence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Attended</th>
<th>Did Not Attend</th>
<th>Reason for Not Attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Please respond to the questions below:

1. Have the youth programs that your child attended been effective in engaging him/her?
   Yes ____ No: ______

2. Are you aware that the church has recently hired a youth pastor? Yes:___ No:____
3. If yes, do you have the youth pastor’s contact information? Yes:____ No:____

4. What role do you expect the youth pastor to play in the life of your child?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Please provide your contact information and the best way of communicating with you:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. Are you interested in carpooling with other families for youth events? Yes:__ No:___

7. Can you be a chaperon at some youth programs? Yes_____ No ______