



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMAN SCIENCE (AJAHS)

ISSN: 2832-451X (ONLINE)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 5 (2023)

PUBLISHED BY: E-PALLI, DELAWARE, USA

Advancing Youth Ministry in the Church towards Transforming Lives, Spiritual and Social Being

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Article Information

Received: December 19, 2022

Accepted: December 26, 2022

Published: January 06, 2023

Keywords

*Spiritual Formation, Spiritual
Being, Youth Ministry,
Spirituality, Bocaue, Bulacan*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover how spiritual formation in Bocaue transforms the lives of the youth and how it strengthens their faith in God. Anchored in this study are John Fisher's Four Domains of Spirituality, Health, and Well-Being and Soren Kierkegaard's Three Stages of Life. The study was qualitative-phenomenological research with semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and significant statements were chosen. These were categorized into theme clusters in order to get the emergent themes. The emergent themes reflected in the interviews were: Assimilation of Spiritual Formation, Justification of Spiritual Engagement, Before-and-After of Spiritual Engagement, and the Experiences in the Youth Ministry. The significant statements were carefully analyzed and categorized into themes. The following conclusions were drawn: (1) The youth sees the youth ministry and the spiritual formation as a platform for them to change for the better; (2) There are different reasons why the youth are joining the youth ministry by the influence of others, trained by the school, overcoming problems and personal growth; (3) The lives of the youth became better when they started their service in the church and; (4) The youth ministry truly transforms the lives of the young people in many aspects.

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed part of a person's life to have a basis for their living. People always look for inspiration for them to have strength in the struggles they face each day and in dealing with their problems and decisions in life.

Each day, problems are encountered by many. For youth-related matters alone, there are a lot of cases being recorded. The World Assembly of Youth (2019) attested that there are fourteen (14) youth-related issues in society. Some of these problems which are relevant to the Philippines are: (1) The abuses that the young women are experiencing be it sexual, physical or emotional, (2) the spread of HIV/AIDS which keeps on rising year after year, (3) consumption of drugs due to recreational use instead of using them for medical benefits, (4) unemployment affecting the youth is also a major concern, and (5) a number of young people are involved in committing crimes. With these cases occurring continually, young people truly need help and guidance in order to live an ideal life for them.

On the other hand, decision-making is absolutely needed in every chapter of the life of a person. People are shaped by their decisions in which, and those decisions may have life-and-death consequences with that, he asserted that there are matters to take into consideration in making choices anchored in their Christian faith (Benneth, n.d.). With the decisions being anchored in faith, it implies that religion plays a crucial role in developing a person's spiritual well-being. Spirituality as defined by the writers of TakingCharge.edu (n.d.) is an aspect wherein an individual is searching for the meaning or purpose of their existence and the way they experience their belongingness with the things around them. This includes, of course, the activities in their church where they get to meet people

who are experiencing problems they can relate to. People are also getting the chance to share their life experiences and with that, they can serve as an inspiration to others as well. Through their religion or community, they will be able to establish a connection with each other and the supreme being they believe in.

Every person is looking for ways how to live their life to the fullest. Despite all the problems people are facing, they would always try to find a way how to improve their life situation and be a contributor to making the world a better place.

Similarly, people would always ask themselves the question 'what makes life worth living?' As mentioned by Teo (2018), although a person already possesses the things that are believed to be necessary for life, they will still feel empty if they do not have the meaning they are trying to look for.

In that case, spirituality plays an essential role in the lives of people as it benefits them in many aspects. There is a study conducted by Howell in 2013 that, spiritual people possess positive characteristics such as being gracious, compassionate, optimistic, and self-actualized. Hence, people are engaging themselves in different activities which would enhance their spiritual well-being. One of the ways to approach spirituality is through religion, which is also widely known. This is the reason why people are joining spiritual formations in their respective churches.

Various spiritual formations in the town of Bocaue are being conducted by the parishes for the people, specifically for the youth. The parishes namely, (1) St. Martin of Tours, Parish; (2) Nuestro Señor Jesucristo and St. Andrew Kim Taegon Parish of Lolombo, and (3) St. Peter of Alcantara Parish of Taal are doing their best to provide spiritual formations to the members of

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their community, this is for the betterment of not just the church community but also help the municipality grow through shaping the citizens, especially the youth to be good individuals.

One of the spiritual formations they offer for the youth is the Singles Encounter, an annual retreat for single men and women. This activity aims to help the youth in tackling concerns and challenges that they experience in their everyday life. They undergo a series of talks and activities in their 3day retreat, to help them be guided in their journey, to help them understand themselves more, to help them have a better relationship with others, to help them be a good social entity to their community and be closer to God. The Singles Encounter is being sponsored by the previous SE graduates, for them to share the feeling they have experienced during their batch. The participants would start as strangers and along the activities, they will be able to establish a relationship and be part of the SE family. Its goal is to help an individual to become better and be ready for life's troubles and difficulties with the help of newly established friendships, and new realizations about their life (SEWeekend.com, n.d.).

Another is serving as one of the Altar Servers or Knights of the Altar. These people play a vital role during Eucharistic celebrations, they assist the priests to ensure that the parishioners are celebrating the Mass in the most prayerful way. Also, more of being asked of them is being able to help others strengthen their faith and encounter Christ through their service (Church of St. Mary of the Angels, 2019).

The church also has an organization for the youth known as the Parish Commission on Youth (PCY). It is under the guidance of the PPC or the Parish Pastoral Council, and the task of this organization is to be an inspiration to the youth to be part of the parish community. The commission organizes and supervises activities that help the parish and its parishioners and helps the youth to enhance their potential to be leaders and to become responsible and mature members of the community (St. Joseph PCY, n.d.).

Being engaged in spiritual formations mentioned, as members of the youth ministry, they are not just helping themselves but also the betterment of their community through outreach activities and advocacy projects that were being conducted by the youth ministry. They give assistance whenever needed especially during feasts and special days for the Catholics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health, and Well-being

This Grounded Theory qualitative research conducted by Fisher (2011) developed detailed descriptions of what is called the four domains of spirituality, health, and well-being. Human existence, according to Fisher, can be categorized into the following domains which are: (1) relationship with self or the Personal Domain; (2)

relationship with others or the Communal Domain; (3) relationship with the environment or the Environmental Domain and; (4) relationship with transcendent Other or the Transcendental Domain.

The Personal Domain is where an individual intra-relates with oneself in accordance with their search for the essence of their existence. Communication with oneself and self-realization would lead the person to contentment in his search for identity and self-worth.

The Communal Domain is concerned with the interpersonal relationships of the person. This is between an individual and the other people around them, because of their relationship, they are able to express love, forgiveness, hope, trust, and faith. Relationships with others, help them grow in the aspect of morality, culture, and even in religion.

The Environmental Domain, from the word itself, 'environment' shows the relationship of an individual with the physical and biological aspects of the community. Through this domain of spiritual well-being, people are developing their love and care for what they believe was provided for them by the Creator.

Lastly, the Transcendental Domain is the relationship with the One beyond the human level. This shows that people believe that something powerful created the universe, through this, people are able to show their faith in God through adoration and worship.

The domains that emerged from the grounded theory research of John Fisher may aid the study in finding out which factors may contribute to the spiritual well-being of the youth.

Three Stages of a Full and Happy Life

An old Danish philosopher in the 19th Century, Soren Kierkegaard, according to Sturm (2017), identified that in a lifetime of a person, there are three possible stages – these are the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage, and the religious stage.

The first stage can be described by the word, 'pleasure'. The Aesthetic Stage is where people are after the things that feel good and the pleasure of experiencing beauty. That means this is the stage where people enjoy their twenties experiencing the wonder of life such as listening to music, seeing a movie, and traveling from one place to another.

The Ethical Stage, on the other hand, is where a person learns how to follow the rules and the laws of society. They are inclined to obligations and responsibilities, this is where people start to build a home, have kids, and have jobs. People in this stage, also understand who they are in terms of their commitments, and realize that they are tied to others and to society. Most of the people here exist as adults, they try to do the right thing and the rational thing. Lastly, the Religious Stage is perhaps the highest stage of life that people can hope to be. It does not necessarily involve any belief system in particular but it is just about progressing past the previous two stages in life. Life here becomes profound and lively. From enjoying the beautiful things in life to having responsibilities and obligations,

this is where people would try to look for the purpose in fulfilling their duty. The aesthetic and ethical stages are concerned with the outer conception of life, while the religious stage is trying to reconcile it with the inner.

In connection, the participants of this study would be the youth of Bocaue, through Kierkegaard's Stages of Life, the researcher would determine if the youth are already having a glimpse of what a religious stage would be aside from knowing their responsibility as a member of the youth ministry and the church or even as a member of the society.

Statement of the Problem

This research aimed to explore the feelings and spiritual well-being of the youth ministry in the church of Bocaue, Bulacan. Specifically, it seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What is Spiritual Formation in the perception of the participants?
2. Why do the youth in Bocaue engage themselves in spiritual activities in their parish?
3. How would they differentiate their life as a member of an organization in the church and their life if they are not engaged in any spiritual formation?
4. How can the experiences of the youth in the church be described in terms of:
 - a. Church activities;
 - b. Relationships with church mates, and;
 - c. Personal spiritual encounter?

METHODS

Research Design

In order to come up with an analysis of the topic, the researcher used the qualitative research design. Creswell (n.d.) asserted that this procedure relies on text and image data, it follows a different way of analyzing the data gathered by the researcher and the data collection may either be through observations or interviews.

Since the focus of the study was on the faith and spiritual well-being of the youth, the researcher believed that the phenomenological approach is the proper design to use to explore the individual experiences of the youth in Bocaue when it comes to their faith and engagement in spiritual activities and being part of the youth ministry. Phenomenology deals with revealing the essence or the essential structure of the phenomenon being studied. In relation, phenomenology is the study of what a person experiences in this world, with the nature of this study, the researcher would find out how the youth ministry or spiritual formations transformed the lives of the youth in Bocaue through their experiences (Morrow, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were used in collecting the data since spiritual well-being is an unmeasurable variable and it has to be explored through deeper discussions. It was conducted with one respondent at a time, and it was a combination of closed- and open-ended questions. Follow-up questions of how and why may be given to the participants as well (Adams, 2015).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the municipality of Bocaue, Bulacan which is subdivided into 19 barangays. Specifically, informants of the study came from the three parishes of the municipality.

The first one, St. Martin of Tours Parish Church in Bocaue Town Proper covers the following barangay; Poblacion, Biñang 1st, Biñang 2nd, Turo, Bunlo, Bambang, Sulucan, Bagumbayan, Antipona, Wakas and Bolakan.

The second one is located in Brgy. Taal which is the St. Peter Alcantara Parish Church. It covers the four barangays by the northeast of Bocaue; Taal, Tambubong, Caingin and Batia.

Lastly, the one with two patron saints, Nuestro Señor Jesucristo and St. Andrew Kim Tae-Gon Parish Church covers the remaining barangays which are; Lolombo, Bundukan, Duhat, and Igulot.

Research Informants

The informants of the study were the youth of Bocaue who have experienced joining the youth ministry in their respective parish. By the term youth ministry, the informants should be a member of any of the following organizations: The Singles Ministry, Parish Commission on Youth, and Servers of the Altar. No gender preferences were considered in selecting the informant.

There were 12 informants interviewed and Purposive Sampling was used in this study which means, the informant was chosen based on the knowledge of the researcher that they could provide answers to the objective of the study (Baracerros, 2019).

Research Instrument

A set of guide questions were presented to the interviewees during the data collection. This is for the researcher to know their experiences and their faith after becoming a member of the youth ministry. The interview was semi-structured for the informants to be comfortable throughout the process, it would be an informal and conversational style. The questions were translated into Filipino due to the same reason.

1. What do you think of the spiritual formations being conducted in your respective parish?
2. What are your reasons for joining the youth ministry in your parish?
3. How would you describe your life before becoming a member of the youth ministry?
4. How would you describe your experiences during the spiritual activities, programs, and gatherings in your church aside from the eucharistic celebrations?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your family and churchmates?
6. How would you encourage your family members and friends to join the spiritual activities you have been into?
7. What is the most rewarding experience you had in the youth ministry?
8. How do you deal with your problems after experiencing spiritual formations in your parish?

9. Do you even feel more of the presence of God with the youth ministry?

10. How do spiritual formations and the youth ministry affect your life as a whole?

Data Gathering Procedure

After designing the research instrument, it was presented to the research adviser to make sure that it is reliable and valid for the data collection and make sure that the questions to be presented to the informants are bias-free. Subsequently, in order for the researcher to conduct the interviews, the letters of consent were submitted to the offices of the three parishes in Bocaue. Upon approval, the interview took place. During the interview, the researcher recorded the answers from the informant using an audio recorder. The recordings served as the data for the study which then were transcribed word by word for the analysis and interpretation of the researcher. The answers from the informants were arranged into themes to reflect the needed answers to the objective of the study.

Data Analysis

A method proposed by Colaizzi (1978), there are seven steps to follow in analyzing a descriptive phenomenological study which is common in the field of humanities and social sciences.

The analysis of data depends upon the first-person accounts of what they have experienced in joining the youth ministry and various spiritual formations. First, the researcher has undergone a stage of familiarization by reading several times the participants' answers to the interview questions. Second, the significant statements were identified in relevance to the objective of the study. Third, the researcher formulated meanings from the significant statements identified. Then, the formulated meanings were clustered into themes that are common across all accounts. After that, there was a comprehensive description of what are the themes all about, and was condensed into short statements which would be truly essential to the structure of the spiritual well-being of the youth. Lastly, after producing the fundamental structure, the researcher returned them to the participants of the study to verify if it captures their experiences and spiritual well-being in the youth ministry that they have shared purposefully with the study (Morrow, et al., 2015).

DISCUSSION

The questions presented in the statement of the problem were answered in this chapter. The statements from the participants of the study have undergone analysis for the researcher to identify themes and concepts relevant to the objectives of the study which is to explore the spiritual being of the youth in their respective ministries. First, the researcher identified the significant statements which were coded into different clusters to come up with the answers to the research questions. The emergent themes are as follows: Assimilating Spiritual Formation, Justification of

Spiritual Formation Engagement, The Before-and-After of the Spiritual Engagement, and Experiences in the Youth Ministry.

Assimilating Spiritual Formation

This terminology emerged from the statements of the informants that express their insights or perception of the spiritual formation being conducted in their parish. The statements from the informants were based on their experiences in joining spiritual formation or any church activities. According to the informants, spiritual formation in their parish give a lot of positive impacts on those who are involved. Because of spiritual formation, members are being able to socialize with their fellows, their community is getting bigger due to encouraging other people to join as well. Aside from that, they are also building their relationship with God through spiritual activities and they are spending more time with the Almighty. Spiritual formation also gives them a feeling of satisfaction, when they see their friends serving with them, it makes them happy, they are also experiencing an unexplainable feeling as if their soul is relieved with every spiritual encounter.

The informants gave their perception of spiritual formation or the things that it can give to them. The first one is all about how they socialize with their churchmates. "And of course, to build friendship and to socialize with other people." (SB 2, Line 136-138)

"I get to know a lot of people; we were able to deepen our friendship and serving the Lord became the foundation of that relationship." (SB 8, Line 901-903)

As mentioned above, the informants who were able to experience spiritual formation said that they were able to get to know other members of the church and establish good friendships with them. In connection, since they were able to socialize with each other, they are also inviting other people to join them resulting in the population of their community getting bigger. To testify:

"Those activities are the reasons why we are having a community." (SB 3, Line 253-255)

"Every third week of the month, we have this Taas-Noo Katoliko wherein, there is a community mass being conducted on the streets to reach out to other people." (SB 9, Line 960-962)

Additionally, the community is getting larger for they are reaching out to other people as well through community masses and other activities that encourage their fellows to attend. In relevance, Herbeck (2016) stated that in serving the Lord, people are not just building friendships, they are creating a community wherein they pray together, host each other in their homes, and help each other evangelize. People are not just establishing their good relationship with each other but also, with the Almighty God. As cited: "They wanted to build up their relationship with God." (SB 1, Line 6-7)

"Those activities enhance ourselves physically and mentally to get closer to God." (SB 3, Line 251-253)

As clearly stated by the informants, spiritual formation is

one of the reasons why they get closer to God. They get to have a peaceful moment to think and to talk with the Almighty. In relation, people are hungry for an intimate relationship with God especially if they grow in spiritual maturity (Zavada, 2019).

Moreover, spiritual formation is not just giving impact the relationships of people and with God, it also gives a feeling of satisfaction to the youth. First, convincing their friends or other people to join or to serve with them gives them a feeling of joy. To testify:

“For me, it is joyful and I love the feeling when you encourage them to serve Him or to get closer to God.” (SB 1, Line 2-4)

“Although I am not with them, I always ask them, ‘Did you attend the mass?’ Then, it is something to me that they did.” (SB 9, Line 27-28)

Seeing their other friends serving the Lord or attending the activity is something good for the young servers. Aside from the happiness, they are experiencing out of the encouragement of their friends, they receive an unexplainable feeling as well as if their soul is being relieved every spiritual encounter. As cited:

“It feels good and relieving, it is something different. Then, there is something that you feel relieves your soul every time there is an activity in the church.” (SB 1, Line 33-36)

“And then, the smile of the kids is priceless. It relieved our tiredness.” (SB 3, Line 371-372)

The spiritual formation or activities being conducted in their parish, relieve their stress and their soul as a whole. The spiritual self or the ‘soul’ of the person has always a direct and continuous connection with the spiritual dimension or the Holy Spirit which means, it is the soul of the people that communicates with the Holy Spirit of God. In connection, by attending spiritual formation and other activities, they are relieving their soul and establishing a strong connection with the spiritual dimension (Culliford, 2012).

Justification of Spiritual Engagement

The first reason is being influenced by others, by seeing other people serving the Lord or the part of the youth ministry, gave them the curiosity to join and to feel what a server feels every time they serve in the church. To cite: “It was Holy Week back then; I saw Sacristans on the processions and I was curious about what they are doing. So, a week after, I joined as a Sacristan.” (SB 2, Line 132-135)

“I told my mom, ‘Ma, I want to join the Sacristan, something like that,’ Because I really like going to church, it has been my past time.” (SB 9, Line 972-975)

As seen from the statements above, one factor that encourages the youth to join the ministry is curiosity, because they see other people enjoying what they are doing and they want to feel that as well.

Another is that a family member is already part of the ministry in the church which gave them the opportunity to join as well. To attest:

“I actually get envious of my brother because I always see him leaving the house, not knowing that he is already serving as a lector.” (SB 3, Line 259-261)

“Actually, my aunt and my cousins, they were first to become Sacristan before me. So, they were the ones who encouraged me to become a Sacristan.” (SB 4, Line 470-473)

It is truly a factor when one of your relatives or family members is part of the ministry of the church. As a member of the ministry, especially the mother, they will encourage their children to know more about God and serve Him through being part of the youth ministry. In accordance, Hutchison (2017) said that doing ministry together as a family gives a positive impact on the household, the family that serves together would have a healthy marriage and stable relationship with their children.

Not only being influenced by others but also being in a school where they are being taught how to serve the Lord even at such a young age. The informants shared that they are already part of the ministry of the school and its spiritual formation is the reason why they were enlightened and decided to extend their service to their parish church. To attest:

“I think with DYCI, they helped me how to become a God-centered student.” (SB 3, Line 283-285)

The school’s different activities and programs such as retreat and recollection, it was a big help for the students to get to know God, leading them to be part of the youth ministry. Those programs were shaping their personality to be good individuals and put God at the center of everything. Aside from that, there are also informants who are already serving in their school’s ministry and happened to extend their service to their church. To cite: “Because of the mission of our school, I got closer to Him, unlike back then.” (SB 8, Line 877-879)

“Then, I am also joining the Junior Catechists in the church, and from school. In that way, I was able to share my knowledge about God.” (SB 9, Line 1067-1070)

Indeed, their school has been their stepping stone in order for them to extend their service to the Lord. Their experience in the ministry of the school made them realize that it should not stop there and young people are also needed in the youth ministry of the Parish. In school, students have an opportunity to teach children about the Word of God, by that way, they are serving the community already, being a flexible educational institution not just focusing on academics but also on other very important facets for holistic nurturing (Barcelona, 2020). Furthermore, the informants also shared that they are joining the youth ministry in their church because of the problems they are facing. First, problems such as family matters pushed them to be part of the organization. As cited:

“I think it is because of family problems why I was pushed to be here, and also self-problem, they are pushing me to serve or to go to church.” (SB 1, Line 8-10)

In the hopes that they can fix the problems within their

family, the youth are joining the spiritual formation in the church. They find peace in serving the Lord as well as forgetting the problems they left behind at home. In relation, in every challenge that a person faces, the best way to overcome them is to look to the Lord, that is how they surpass the barriers of life. Serving the Lord brings them comfort which is why they continue doing it, to forget the problems they are facing (Regoli, 2017).

In addition, serving the Lord and attending spiritual formation can help in minimizing the challenges and struggles they are facing. Through these activities and endeavors, they are getting stronger hence, seeing problems smaller and handling them easily. To affirm:

“It is actually helping us to lessen the problems we have.” (SB 1, Line 76-77)

With the statement above, problems are getting smaller if they are with God, serving Him, and feeling His presence. To reiterate, people always look for God every time they face a struggle in life, be it personal, family matters, or relationship problems with friends or special someone. For them, serving in the church has been their way of coping with their problems. The spiritual formation gives them joy and comfort.

The third reason for the informants involves their personal growth. They joined the youth ministry because they want to improve their life and change for the better. And they also gain new knowledge or learn new lessons through the Word of God being fed to them by the church.

In order for them to grow personally and spiritually, they wanted to change for the better, and they believe that the church and the spiritual formation can help them do that.

To cite:

“I think when I started serving, I was able to help myself to grow.” (SB 1, Line 22-23)

Indeed, serving the Lord, and having time to reflect on the things in life helps people grow in terms of their personalities, they get to improve their interpersonal skills by socializing with other people instead of staying at home, and in terms of their emotions, they are learning how to control it because they feel comfortable in the church. In accordance, spiritual formation sharpens the attentiveness of one person to God and it helps them be more and more like Jesus, hence, they are changing their lives for the better (Throop, 2011).

As part of growing, people are also gaining new knowledge or lessons and they are able to apply them in their lives. It is from the Word of God that they learn how to deal with their fellowmen, handle problems and be a good member of society. As asserted:

“I was enlightened and my personality becomes livelier every time I hear the Word of God.” (SB 3, Line 438-440) By hearing the Word of God, people are getting enlightened and the lessons they learned from it become vital in their everyday lives. As has been mentioned above, it helps them grow personally, and it gives color to their life as it is the basis or foundation of their living.

Before-and-After Spiritual Engagement

After getting their insights about spiritual formation and determining their reasons for joining, the informants also shared the situation they were in when they are not yet members of the youth ministry and what happened after they were introduced to the youth ministry and immersed in various spiritual formations.

Considering that life is full of struggles in which, people are facing different problems in families, finances, health, and other issues. As a non-member of the youth ministry, they were having difficulties in facing their problems, they are involved in bad habits or activities, they have no interest in church activities, and having negative views in life.

As aforementioned by the informants, they joined the ministry because they wanted to lessen their problems or at least learn how to handle challenges in life. They have difficulties in facing problems back when they are not in the ministry. As cited:

“I think back then, I deal with my struggles so hard.” (SB 1, Line 20-21)

“Of course, because I was just a kid then, I cannot tell if I work on it too hard but I always try to understand my problems.” (SB 7, Line 849-853)

Since they do have not enough guidance and prefer to deal with their problems alone, they are having difficulties in handling them, with no one to share with. Regarding that, there are principles to understand in facing challenges in the Christian way, first is that struggles are part of the mortal experience, second is challenges can help people grow, and third is maintaining faith in the Lord in order to have the strength to solve problems and overcome them and lastly, understand that people must endure to the end (The Gospel and the Procedure Life Student Manual, 2017).

Moreover, the informants do not have also interest in church activities even though they have experienced attending masses. To cite:

“Back then before I started serving, I am really lazy when it comes to attending masses because you have to stand and listen for an hour.” (SB 3, Line 276-279)

“Back then, I do not attend masses regularly, only once a month.” (SB 6, Line 690-691)

Seeing that the world today has so many things to offer, such as technological advancements and other platforms of entertainment. When they are not yet members of the youth ministry, the informants have no interest in attending church activities.

In addition, as part of being a non-member of the youth ministry, the informants are having negative perspectives in life. As evidence:

“Before I enter being a Lector, I always think negatively, then I always think that I cannot do some things.”

(SB 3, Line 353-355)

“I think I am not an optimistic person back then. I was just playing around and not thinking of anything.” (SB 10, Line, 1095-1097)

A negative outlook toward life is truly present in people who do not have someone or a community to lean on. With the youth ministry, people would have friends to talk to and understand different aspects of life because of the activities in the church. In relevance, with the guidance of the ministry or feeling the presence of God, the youth would understand that embracing a life of positive thinking would not mean the struggle will be easy, but being prepared for the challenges they are about to face. Each time that a person struggles with negativity, the guidance of the Lord will keep them fighting, hence, being part of a youth ministry is a big thing (Miles, n.d.). On the other hand, being a member of a youth ministry made a positive impact on the informants. They learned to think of others first, before thinking of themselves and they lift all of their problems and pain to the Lord. As shown:

“Like what I said, I always think of other people first before I solve my own problems.” (SB 1, Line 86-88)

“Like what I said a while ago, I became more open to people, I stopped being selfish, and I think of other people more.” (SB 10, Line 1182-1184)

Serving the Lord means being selfless because, in the youth ministry, the young people are being taught to think of others by helping them through simple acts this includes spreading the Word of God and introducing Him to other people. People in the church are supposed to be striving for selflessness, like Jesus. One lesson that people are learning from the church is to love neighbors as they love themselves, not literally neighbors but people who are considered to be the lost, the least, and the last (Bell, 2018).

The youth also learned that in every struggle they face, God will always help them or make a way to overcome their problems. To testify:

“When I became a Sacristan, I share my problems with God and everything I am grateful for in life.” (SB 2, Line 146-145)

“I lift everything to God and I do not overthink my problems anymore. I don’t think of them because it will be solved if you will believe in God.” (SB 5, Line 637-641)

With their mind being nourished with good principles in life and with the guidance of God through the youth ministry, the informants believed that God will always be there to help in all the problems they face. With that, they lift everything to Him, and they do not think of their problems too much anymore. Whenever people feel desperate, they put everything in God’s hands, believing that it would change everything, or at least would give them enough courage to keep going (House of Hermens, 2018).

Experiences in the Youth Ministry

The experiences of the youth in their church ministry can be described in terms of their relationship with one another, their spiritual activities, encouraging other people to be part of their ministry, and their encounter with God.

The informants’ relationship with one another is vital for them to find comfort in the youth ministry. According to the informants, they become comfortable with each other, in each time they spend together because of the closeness they have established. When they were just new to the group, they received a warm welcome and in hard times, they can count on each other by listening to each other’s problems and giving pieces of advice.

Being in a group of youth-serving the Lord by serving others also means having friends who share the same goal. To quote:

“They are not hard to please because we have the same mission, to serve God, to serve the people, the church and the community.” (SB 1, Line 41-44)

“We always play like ordinary friends. Sometimes we do silly things together but when it comes to serving, we are serious.” (SB 2, Line 164-168)

Having friends in the youth ministry gives them so many reasons to continue the good things they are doing in the church. They consider each other as brothers and sisters because they share the same faith, the same mission, and the same goal. Friendship is vital to the growth of each person and their endurance as Christians. To make the bond stronger, Christ should be the center of it, since it is the youth ministry, they enjoy serving God together and helping each other in times of need (Hoover, 2018).

The strong bond within the youth ministry begins with a warm welcome for the new members. As cited:

“The first time I attended, you will not feel out of place because they will welcome you warmly.” (SB 3, Line 309-311)

“They want us to start younger. In St. Martin, they welcome the new ones and hold a ceremony that baptizes the newcomers, we welcome them as a family.” (SB 10, Line 1111-1115)

Members of the youth ministry or the church, welcome their newbies with open arms, treating each other as families in order to accomplish their mission as Christians. One of the highest factors for people to stay connected in the church is the genuine camaraderie of the people. Giving a warm welcome to new members is essential for forming a relationship because it removes obstacles and uncertainty that hinder people to be connected. When people feel that they are welcome, they stick around and get involved in each endeavor of the group (Morris, 2016).

Once they are a part of the youth ministry, in which they consider each other as a family, they provide guidance, and pieces of advice whenever one of them is facing problems. To wit:

“For example, when I am at home, they ask me if I am fine, what am I going to do, and if I am available. I think they care for you, if you have a problem, they will try to help.” (SB 7, Line 786-789)

“There is also one person who helped me and told me that, ‘Why do you have to be depressed? Life has many offers to you.’” (SB 10, Line 1166-1168)

As brothers and sisters, they truly embody the lesson

that the church is teaching them, 'love one another.' That simple act that they are doing, listening to each other's problems, helps their churchmates to feel less lonely and handle their problems properly because of the advice, they know that someone believes that they can. When people share problems with each other, they create a culture of honesty and safety. They also get to model how Christians trust Christ through trials which is true as shown by the informants in the youth ministry (Reed, 2015).

Aside from relationships with their churchmates, the informants also stated their experiences in spiritual activities. To prove:

"We taught children in the community because it is so memorable for me and it draws me closer to them, they are cute and I see that they really want to learn. And I get closer to God." (SB 1, Line 41-44)

"In school, the kids, I am also a Catechist, we encourage them and we teach them Catechism." (SB 10, Line 1131-1133)

As part of their activities in the church, the informants also experienced teaching children in their community. Teaching Catechism benefits not only the children but them also. As mentioned above, they feel happy with what they are doing. As enumerated by Meyer (n.d.), there are several good reasons for catechizing oneself and teaching catechism to children. It helps children in memorizing biblical truths, it also establishes firm beliefs among the children, opens touch points between the children and their parents when it comes to faith issues, and helps parents to strengthen their beliefs and what to teach their children.

With their involvement in the youth ministry, the informants also have the chance to share what they are good at or showcase their talents in serving God. To attest:

"Yes, because in Youth for Christ, I experienced there to dance for the glory of God, every day we are together, when there is PYD Parish Youth Day, we always go to different places for worship." (SB 3, Line 402-406)

"Yes, because in a church there are actually groups like music ministry while there is production ministry. So, the production group is the one who is in charge of designing and planning the looks of the altar." (SB 7, Line 747-751)

As the above statements say, the informants were able to share their talents in the church wherein the members of the production ministry are utilizing their creativity to make the appearance of the church appealing to the parishioners. On the other hand, the music ministry is sharing its voice to give harmony inside the church. In relation, the enrichment of a parish depends upon the sharing of gifts and talents of its parishioners, it is a shared responsibility. All members of the church have roles to play, which is to share their God-given gifts so that the parish communities would continue to grow and flourish as a place where people develop their faith in the Lord (Ezop, 2017).

In continuation, the informants are also receiving a

feeling of freedom every time they are engaged in a spiritual formation. To wit:

"First, I remember it through happiness, every gathering we have in the church, we forget our anger, we forget that there are walls that limit us." (SB 4, Line 491-494)

When people get to talk to themselves, reflect, and communicate with the Almighty, they are forgetting that they are experiencing the obstacles of life hence, having a feeling of freedom whenever they are doing spiritual activities. As explained by Wright (2019) in her article, in order to achieve spiritual freedom, one should have a kind of engagement in spiritual exercises. If people really want to be free, they have to acknowledge their emotions, receive, feel and reflect on them.

In encouraging others, the informants have the same sentiments, the first thing they do when they want to encourage their friends to join the youth ministry is to share their experiences from the activities that they have been into. As evidence:

"I think I will share my experience with them. I'm going to tell them how glad we are when we are serving and how we contribute to our fellow young people." (SB 1, Line 63-65)

"The most beautiful activity we have is the Youth Day wherein there are a lot of activities being conducted like worship. I will show them the things that are happening to us if ever they want to try, and if they like it, there is nothing wrong if they will pursue it." (SB 5, Line 665-670)

Sharing of experiences might give an overview to their friends to join the youth ministry, although not going into detail to retain the element of surprise, the informants just want to share what they have felt, and the good things they received afterward.

In addition, the informants are also encouraging their friends and family to join by exerting personal efforts to accompany them in attending masses or church activities. To wit:

"Of course, first thing, invite them to attend mass, with that, every time they hear the Word of God, they will be enlightened and curious about the content and the message of the Bible." (SB 3, Line 343-346)

"Then I will tell them, to try being one of the collectors. You will invite them surprisingly then once they enjoy it, they will surely continue serving." (SB 5, Line 610-613)

The last point in encouraging others, the informants are serving as an inspiration to others to be like them, and to be part of the youth ministry. To testify:

"With the people watching us, they will be encouraged to join as well, because the role of the YFC Youth for Christ does not just stop with serving the church, but we also have team building to strengthen our bond." (SB 3, Line 338-341)

"I will give them a talk, in that way, they will be inspired, they will believe in God." (SB 4, Line 561-563)

As given by the informants, the above statements imply that in order to invite others to be part of the youth ministry, they have to make an effort and try some ways

which they believe would attract their fellows to serve God wholeheartedly. As written by Kelly in 2018, there are ways to attract new members to the church. One of these ways is that they should be brought to church by their friends, family, or relatives because it can actually provide comfort and ease the sense of isolation that is normal when a person is unfamiliar with their environment. Indeed, having familiar faces to see inside the church would eventually be comfortable for the new members, so in encouraging others in the church, it is important to accompany them and exert a personal effort for them to feel that they are truly welcome in the ministry.

Finally, another aspect of the informants' experience in the youth ministry is their connection with God, their faith, and how they encounter Him at all times.

Since they have established a good relationship with God, they considered the church as their second home already. They believe that they belong in the church which is why they are always in the church. To show:

"As time goes by, the time that you are spending is no big deal anymore, it's becoming a hobby, that you are serving and then the church becomes your second home." (SB 3, 267-271)

"Yes, it is like you will always want to go to church and serve." (SB 5, Line 598-599)

As the above statement from the informants implies, the church becomes home to those who are serving the Lord willingly. In addition, with them being always in the church and they have a good relationship with God, therefore, His presence is always felt by the informants. As cited:

"One thing I have to remember is God is always here for us, guiding us always and ready to welcome us with open arms." (SB 7, Line 846-867)

"Of course, these days most of the youth are suicidal. Although sometimes you will feel that there is still hope, there is God that you know that He is just there for you." (SB 9, Line 1055-1059)

Belongingness to the church, and always feeling the presence of God also means having more time to talk with Him. To cite:

"I really feel the presence of the Lord every time I have problems, I pray and I feel better." (SB 8, Line 924-926)

"I sometimes blame God for why I have so many problems but, in the meantime, I overcome my depression through Him also." (SB 10, Line 1163-1165)

Finally, with all of these coming together means the informants are forming a stronger faith in the Lord. Their stay in the church and talking to God oftentimes to raise their pains and problems means that they believe that God will help them in whatever obstacle they are struggling with. To prove:

"When I was in Grade 6, my mother was hospitalized during my birthday, then she was not around at my graduation. I just wished that she recovers soon and so it is. I feel like He helped me." (SB 8, Line 917-921)

"Back when I am sick, I ask Him, 'God, if it is Your will to heal me then so be it, so I can continue serving You.

Then, the next day, I was doing good already.'" (SB 4, Line 541-5440)

The statements above prove that they developed a strong faith in the Lord because of their involvement in the church, they spend so much time in the church as if it is their home and always talking to God, to lift all of their problems as they believe that it is God's helping hands that will work once you lift everything up to Him.

There are unexpected things that happen when people encounter the Lord, and although it will not be always what people expected surely, a close encounter with God will give questions to the youth that they do not know that need answers. Being with the Lord opens their mind about their existence in this world, it helps people to understand and to realize the wrong things they have done in their lives therefore, it also helps them to get to the true heart of the issue. Then, after everything, God will give them signs for them to tell others about Him, and share their experience with Him, by inspiring others to be part of the community of servers such as the youth ministry in the church (CCBC Family, n.d.).

CONCLUSIONS

The researcher determined that the youth ministry is vital in enhancing the spiritual being of the young Bocaueños. Their spiritual engagement and service in the church turned them into something better. When it comes to their experiences, the youth ministry has given them many positive impacts. Therefore:

- The youth see the youth ministry and the spiritual formation as platforms for them to change for the better be it in terms of their relationship with their fellows, relationship with God, and self-improvement.

- There are different reasons why the youth are joining the youth ministry and serving the Lord. They were either influenced by their friends or loved ones, or trained by their school, they want to learn how to handle their problems, and in order for them to grow spiritually.

- The lives of the youth became better when they started their service in the church and their involvement in the youth ministry.

- The spiritual being of the youth in Bocaue is being enhanced in the aspect of their relationship with their fellows, the activities they are doing, their ways of encouraging others, and their personal encounter with the Lord every day.

All in all, it can be concluded that the youth ministry in Bocaue such as the Singles Ministry, Music Ministry, and Servers of the Altar can help the youth in improving their spiritual being and transform their lives into a better one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the findings of this research, the following recommendations were established:

For the youth of Bocaue. With the help of this research study, the young people of Bocaue will be able to inspire more people to serve God by helping others. This study will be a piece of concrete evidence that youth ministry

can truly help them grow as a person especially nowadays when suicidal thoughts are prevalent among teenagers. If they want to find friends and good company, the youth ministry is the ideal place because people in here treat each other as family. As shown in the evidence, they share problems with each other making them feel less lonely. Engaging in spiritual activities would help them remove their negative thoughts by comforting them and feeding their minds the knowledge they need in dealing with problems.

For the Municipality of Bocaue. The role of the municipal government would be important since the concern in this study are the youth. There should be programs and activities similar to the youth ministry that would surely help the youth be better contributors in town. First, have programs for their personality to grow and then have programs for the people who are in need, and the ones in-charge in making it happen are the youth. In this way, the local government would be a stepping stone for the youth to help others and encourage others to know more about God.

For the Parish Pastoral Council. This study would be of great help to them. They should continue conducting spiritual formation like SE Weekend and worships that truly help the youth in knowing others, knowing themselves, and most importantly, knowing God. The PPC should make sure that no members will be left behind, they should reach out to the members who stopped attending without saying anything because those people may have problems that can be dealt with by the collective effort of the church members.

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