

## Exploring the voices of children and youth: A plea for renewal in Church structures for child and youth ministries<sup>1</sup>

Beukes, Jacques W  
Stellenbosch University  
[jbeukes@hugenote.com](mailto:jbeukes@hugenote.com)

Van der Westhuizen, Marichen  
Stellenbosch University  
[mvdw@hugenote.com](mailto:mvdw@hugenote.com)

### ABSTRACT

Various trends in Children and youth ministries indicate that the church is struggling to engage with and to serve children and youth effectively. This then impacts negatively on efforts to succeed in this strategic ministry. Considering the decreasing figures of church attendances amongst children and youth, it is proposed that the voices of these children and youth should be heard in an effort to find innovative ways to develop effective Children and youth ministry strategies that will address their unique needs. This article explores the experiences and perceptions of children and youth in the Presbytery of Wellington<sup>2</sup> (URCSA)<sup>3</sup> in an effort to think about new paradigms and new ways of doing in terms of serving children and youth.

### Key words

*Children; children ministry; children and youth ministry; youth; youth ministry*

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- 1 This research was done as an URCSA minister and Coordinator and Facilitator of the Children and Youth Ministry of the Presbytery of Wellington for the said Presbytery's ministry. The findings of this research was compiled in a Presbytery report and permission was granted by the Presbytery of Wellington to use the data for an academic publication.
  - 2 The presbytery of Wellington consist of eleven URCSA congregations in the two towns, Wellington and Paarl. The congregations are Agter-Paarl, Bet-El (Paarl), Huguenot, Immanuel (Paarl), Mbekweni, Newtown, Van Wyksvlei-Wellington, Wagenmakersvallei, Wellington, Wellington Bergrivier and Zion's Church.
  - 3 URCSA refers to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa that was formed in 1994 when the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united.

## 1. Introduction

Various authors<sup>4</sup> refer to the need to revisit our understanding of the place and structure of children and youth ministries in the church. De Vries (2004:21) urges for a new understanding of the *place* of children and youth within the church community. Similarly, and specifically focussing on youth, Strong (2014:3) argues that traditional Youth Ministry has been practised as “an independent ministry, leading to the isolation of the youth from the larger church community”. Knoetze (2015:1) focuses on youth and their parents and identifies a need to explore *who* must reach out to the youth within the church family and also *what* their unique contextual needs are to inform Youth Ministry practices. In line with this viewpoint, and with the emphasis on children, Hendriks and Grobbelaar (2009a; 2009b) identify the need to develop new paradigms and new ways of doing in terms of *servicing* children.

This article is based on the above-mentioned need to further investigate the nature and practice of children and youth ministries. In an effort to ensure that the development of such ministries is related to their specific contextual and developmental needs of children and youth, this article is informed by a research study that explored and described their experiences and perceptions in the Presbytery of Wellington. The article will be introduced by means of a problem statement to provide the rationale for the discussion that will follow, followed by a description of current practices and trends in children and youth ministries. A description of the research methodology implemented will be provided next, followed by separate discussions of data obtained related to children and youth. The article will be concluded with some recommendations to be considered when Children and youth ministries are being developed.

## 2. Problem statement

This article places the focus on children and youth in a congregational context. The term “children”, for the purpose of this article, refers to the age group 10 to 15 years, which falls in the developmental phase of early adolescence. This developmental period is associated with challenging

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4 Knoetze 2015, Strong 2014, De Vries 2004, Hendriks and Grobbelaar 2009a and 2009b.

physical, social and psychological change (Louw and Louw 2007:388; Sheafor and Horesji, 2010:505). Risk factors for children in this developmental stage include substance abuse, low parental monitoring, stressful life events (divorce, death in the family, abuse, etc.) and confusion/stress regarding sexual orientation (Newman and Newman 2012:379-381). For the purpose of this article, it is assumed that participation and involvement in church services and activities can assist children with the following developmental tasks: autonomy from parents/caregivers (i.e. independence), identity formation and internalised morality (cf. Newman and Newman 2012:390) and as such provide them with support to become able to deal with the mentioned risk factors.

Youth, for the purpose of this article, refers to young people in the age group 18 to 35 (cf. African Union Commission 2006:11). This developmental stage should be seen as a period “of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community” (UNESCO, 2015) and, in the case of this article, of becoming an active member of the church community. Louw and Louw (2007:487-493) explain that this age group’s move towards independence is associated with particularly challenging changes in, among others, finding a social identity and acceptance in a peer group and/or in a romantic relationship. Similar to the description above related to children, the role of the church to assist youth could be seen in terms of finding an identity and calling within a Christian value-based peer group. The aim would be to provide a space where a personal relationship with God could develop to assist the youth to develop a Christian identity and to address the mentioned challenges.

Within the South African context, one has to also consider the fact that children and youth are viewed as a vulnerable group (Department of Social Development 2011:32-33), based on various factors of which poverty appears to be a main contributor. Statistics South Africa (2013) reports that approximately 10.2 million people in South Africa live under the breadline of R321.00 per month. This amounts to 20.2% of the population. This then directly affects the well-being of South African children and youth, of which 11.9 million (64% of South African children) are living in families exposed to poverty (UNICEF 2011:21). South Africa furthermore has the third highest unemployment rate among youth in the world (World

Economic Forum 2014). Drawing a link between unemployment and poverty and the role of the church to address the needs of children and youth, and specifically in the Paarl/Wellington area in the Western Cape, a study by Cloete (2007) urged the Presbytery to become involved through children and youth ministry.

The role of the church in supporting and caring for vulnerable groups, such as children and youth, is, among others, also to alleviate suffering, to empower them with knowledge and skills related to healthy living (including spiritual health) and to practice caring for others (Flint, Atkinson and Kearns 2002:7). Including children and youth in the theology of the church is needed in order to ensure that they are able to overcome challenges and that they are equipped to become active members of the church and society. Knoetze (2015:1), however, argues that although the largest part of the African population consists of children and youth, the church in Africa still needs to identify a contextual framework for Children and youth ministries to ensure effective services to children and youth.

Internationally, King (2012:4) refers to a growing concern regarding children and youth leaving the church in Australia and Voas and Watt (2014:2) also note a concern regarding the fact that the church in the United Kingdom “fails to replace older generations of churchgoers”. The latter authors make specific reference to the fact that approximately 50% of children of churchgoing parents leave the church at some stage. It appears that this trend also occurs in South Africa. Within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) there has been a steady decline in the number of children who enrol in the junior catechesis. In the period 2000 to 2004 there was a drastic drop in both junior and senior catechists (Hendriks and Grobbelaar 2009b:360). In URCSA, but specifically the Presbytery of Wellington, over the past decade a tendency of decreasing numbers of children and youth attending and participating in church services and activities were also noted (Congregational Ministries report 2016; cf. Kwago 2003:51-73). Based on this situation, the following research question directed the research study that informed this article: What are the experiences and perceptions of children and youth in the Presbytery of Wellington regarding their needs for children and youth ministries?

As further background to the exploration of the voices of children and youth, current practices will be discussed next.

### 3. Current practices in children and youth ministries

John 17:3 highlights that God wants all human beings to know Him and to have a personal relationship with Him. This then also includes children and youth. Children and youth ministry is traditionally viewed as part of practical theology where the aim is to cultivate a personal relationship with God (Nel 2005:13).

Focusing on children ministries specifically, King (2012:5) refers to the fact that the moral foundations of human beings are generally determined during childhood and notes a concern regarding the lack of active and well-organised Children and youth ministries in Australia. The author therefore urges the church to rethink the nature of services to children to ensure that the groundwork is laid for spiritual and moral development during early adulthood. In line with this argument, Hendriks and Grobbelaar (2009b:360) refers to a study that indicates that children, who used to attend church services, but eventually left the church, had already decided at the age of 9 or 10 years that they will leave the church when parents allow it.

With regards to youth ministry, Dean (2010:3, 24) and Strong (2014:1) reflect on the traditional view that youth ministry is something separate and assert that it appears to be ineffective in supporting young people to develop a Christian maturity. Van Rooi (2011:50) explored how the concept of family correlates with the current realities of the Generation Y and concludes that it is not clear if current practices in Youth Ministries effectively educate and convey knowledge to youth.

With the focus on both children and youth ministries, Voas and Watt (2014:3) postulate that services to children and youth should be relevant to their needs and that relevant and effective Children and youth ministries would result in retaining children and youth in the church community. To include children and youth is essential as children and youth ministry is not just a ministry *to* children and youth, but is also operated *with* and *by* children and youth (cf. Nel, 1998:96). This present article furthermore focuses on Children and youth ministries within the Presbytery of

Wellington's context. Although one could argue that the findings are context-related and that it could not be transferred to other contexts, it should be noted that the children and youth in the mentioned context are exposed to the same risks that make South African children and youth vulnerable. Knoetze (2015:3) refers to the dire circumstances in which children and youth in an African context are living and asks: "What does God expect from his church when 37 000 children die of preventable or poverty-related diseases each day?" The author argues that there is a lack of understanding of the importance of this ministry and that it should be "transformational; the church must aim for Christian discernment to recognise and understand what God is doing at the moment with those who are being ministered to".

The current trend in South Africa is that children and youth ministries consist mostly of junior and senior catechism classes that are based on a "school-model". Consequently, cognitive orientation in catechesis became predominate and the actions and experiences of the children and youth were neglected (cf. Hendriks & Grobbelaar 2009b:363). Kwago's study (2003) also refer to this model and concluded that youth tends to lose interest in the church after confirmation. A further aspect that challenges Children and youth ministries is that worship services and sermons are led as if only adults are present. This leads to children and youth not engaging in the messages and spiritual experiences (Hendriks & Grobbelaar, 2009b:361).

As mentioned before, this article is based on the specific context of the Presbytery of Wellington. In an effort to include children and youth ministry as a focus within the church, the Presbytery of Wellington's ethics of work is based on the Integrated Ministry Model<sup>5</sup> of URCSA. In April 2013 all 11 congregations reached a memorandum of understanding and ordained a reverend as the Presbytery's child and youth facilitator and coordinator to specifically reach out to the children and youth in the congregations.

The need for this pioneer ordination by this presbytery was identified as follows: Firstly, although hundreds of new young church members in the presbytery annually went through catechism classes and the process

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5 cf. Minutes of the Sixth General Synod of URCSA 2012:35-48.

of conformation, the lack of children and youth involvement in church structures and church ministries were noted and became a concern for the URCSA church ministers (cf. Congregational Ministries report 2016; cf. Kwago 2003:51-73; cf. Hendriks & Grobbelaar 2009b:360). Furthermore, a concerning lack of involvement by young people within the Christian Youth Ministry (CYM)<sup>6</sup>, where the youth are supposed to be active, was identified by the leadership in the Presbytery of Wellington. This was apparent as certain congregations within the presbytery did not have established CYM youth branches. Secondly, the research by Kwago (2003) and Cloete (2007) highlighted the need to involve children and youth within the church structures and practices.

The child and youth facilitator and coordinator was appointed to facilitate, coordinate and develop programmes, workshops, and training of all children-related ministries, such as the Sunday school and “kinderbond” and all youth related ministries, such as catechism, CYM and the Youth Brigade. It further entails development of structures where child and youth development, leadership development and youth involvement in church spheres and community spheres are promoted. Life skills related to children and youth developmental stages, “generation-friendly” church services (i.e. catering for all age groups who attend church services), camps, faith formation opportunities, are all included as key aspects of this position.

The current research study that informed this article was conducted to firstly reflect on the effort to develop children and youth ministries by means of “hearing” the experiences and perceptions of the children and youth involved in the ministries and secondly to identify their needs regarding children and youth ministries. The research methodology that was implemented to obtain this goal will be discussed below.

#### **4. Research methodology**

The choice of methodology to be employed were based on the goal of this study, namely to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of children and youth in the Presbytery of Wellington regarding their needs for children and youth ministries. A qualitative approach was followed to

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6 The CYM is URCSA’s youth ministry structure.

provide a platform for the “voices of the insiders” in the situation to be heard (Creswell, 2009:175). Based on the explorative nature of the research goal, the explorative and descriptive research designs associated with qualitative research method were used. Furthermore, the contextual research design was included as this study was demarcated to a specific geographical area. These research designs guided the choices regarding sampling and data collection and analysis (Kreuger & Neuman 2006:23).

The population for this study was children and youth in Wellington. The non-probability sampling method and the purposive sampling technique resulted in the following criteria to be included in the sample: All children between the ages of 10 and 15 (representing early adolescence) and youth between the ages of 15 and 35 who attend church services and children and youth ministry activities within the Presbytery of Wellington (Gravetter and Forzano, 2010:118). Children attending Sunday school were asked to participate, while the youth were invited to participate at CYM meetings. Forty children and two hundred youth participated in this study.

The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews within focus groups during the mentioned children and youth ministry activities. The focus group method of data collection was viewed as appropriate as the children and youth were provided with a structure where they could discuss their experiences and perceptions regarding children and youth ministries within a safe environment. Children and youth were interviewed separately in groups consisting of between 10 and 15 participants (Marlow, 2011:164). In an effort to address the previously mentioned research question, the following questions were asked of the children participants during the focus group meetings:

- How do you experience the church currently?
- How do you experience Sunday school currently?
- What should happen in the church to make you feel welcome?

The youth participants were asked the questions below:

- Why do you come together as young Christians and why specifically as CYM?
- In your opinion, what are the challenges in the CYM and amongst youth?



- What are the disadvantages and concerns amongst the youth and CYM?
- What are the advantages of being in the CYM and amongst the youth?
- What do you want to see happening amongst youth in the church?
- What are your expectations of the child and youth minister?

Tesch's eight steps for the analysis of qualitative data, as described in Creswell (2009:186), were chosen to assist the researcher to analyse the data in a structured and systematic manner.

The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, they were provided with the opportunity to ask questions about the benefits and limitations of participation and only children and youth who volunteered to participate were included in the study. Furthermore, the data was presented as a collective story to ensure confidentiality and privacy (Strydom, 2011:119).

The data obtained from the children and youth participants were analysed separately and will be presented as such in the next sections. The responses of the participants will be summarised as a collective story.

## **5. The perceptions of children regarding the children ministry in the Presbytery of Wellington**

The data obtained from the focus group discussions with children were analysed and resulted in four themes, namely 1) the format of Sunday school as structure for children ministry, 2) the format and nature of church services, 3) parental influence and 4) contextual challenges.

In terms of the *format of Sunday school activities*, the participating children noted that they did not find it interesting. Their descriptions illustrated that they experience the activities as a school-model of learning and that they were not provided with relevant and interesting material related to the Sunday school topics. They reported that they would welcome creative, interactive and stimulating activities related to the topics instead of lessons.

Similarly, the participants' descriptions of their *experiences of church services* reflected that they do not understand the terminology and

vocabulary used by the ministers and that they were therefore unable to understand the message. This resulted, according to them, in an experience of boredom during the services. Another aspect related to the experience of boredom that was noted is that the church and worship hours were too long. Related to the use of unknown vocabulary, some of the participating children explained that their home language was English and that the services were only in Afrikaans, which made it even harder to understand the message. Lastly, they requested that hymns and songs should include songs that they enjoy singing.

*Parental influence* was expressed as the fact that parents do not attend church services and that they are uninvolved in their children's participation in Children Ministry activities. Other participants reported that parents either discourage them from attending church services and children activities at the church, or expect them to only attend Sunday school and then to return home without going to the church.

Considering that some of the participants indicated the lack of parental involvement, it has to be noted that the children need to go to and from church on their own. They reflected on this aspect as a *contextual challenge*. According to them they experienced transport problems after church. This caused them to feel unsafe, especially due to high crime rates in some areas.

## **6. The perceptions of youth regarding the youth ministry in the Presbytery of Wellington**

The data analyses related to the youth focus groups resulted in the following themes that will be discussed below: 1) Reasons for attending the CYM meetings, 2) advantages of participating in the CYM meetings, 3) disadvantages and/or challenges experienced in the CYM meetings, 4) future expectations regarding youth ministry activities and 5) expectations of the child and youth facilitator and coordinator.

*Reasons for attending* the CYM meetings focused on the need to grow spiritually. The participants reported that they wanted to learn more about God's Word and that they attend CYM meetings with the expectation that the meetings would encourage young people to build a personal relationship with the Lord. One participant explained the involvement as a need to "shape, form and transform myself as a better person for the road ahead".

Other participating youth attended CYM meetings to become involved with biblical teachings and with the hope that “it will keep us away from evil” and to become an example for other young people. Related to the need for spiritual growth, they reported that they wanted to share spiritual experiences and to allow God to be part of their lives. The mentioned need to share was elaborated on during the focus group discussions in that the participants indicated that they saw the CYM meetings as an opportunity to be amongst other young people, a way to have fun in a healthy way and to improve socialising and communication skills. They continued to assert that they like to be with other Christian youth and that they do not have something else to do on a Friday evening.

The reasons for attending was elaborated on by means of a description of the *advantages* of being in the CYM. In this regard, they also focused on spirituality and socialisation. Some of the youth reported that they grew spiritually and that they value the opportunity to tell others about the Lord. They mentioned that they felt free to testify, pray and sing and that it teaches them not be ashamed to “stand up for the Lord”. Linked to the reference to singing, some participants enjoyed the spiritual dancing component of the CYM. Other participants felt that involvement in the Church’s CYM made them feel that they are also involved in the church. In terms of the socialisation aspect, they reported that they were able to meet new and different people and to form long lasting friendships at the meetings. The activities assisted them with the improvement of communication skills and they felt empowered through social networking that took place. Related to the earlier discussion concerning the developmental tasks of this group, the participants reported that they became like a close-knitted family, where they experience support and care (love). They explained that they felt safe to share concerns, troubles and feelings and that they are protective of each other.

The participants, however, also discussed *challenges and disadvantages* that they experienced. They expressed concern about the motives of some of the members. It was noted that some members are not interested in the spiritual component and only attended to “have fun and games” or to meet people from the opposite sex. Such members then form sub-groups within the CYM. Some participants, in discussing members who are not focused on spiritual growth, explained that this leads to conflict

or “personality clashes” and harmful communication that negatively impacts on other members’ self-esteem. They continued to explain that some youth are in competition with one another and that this leads to jealousy, gossip and a lack of respect for the purpose of the CYM meetings, namely to focus on Biblical teachings and worshipping. This then leads to a feeling that some members do not cooperate to develop the CYM. With regards to cooperation, they also reported that there is a lack of assistance and cooperation from other CYM branches and an indifference and lack of understanding of the potential value of the CYM by church council members. The latter statement was further elaborated on by a reported feeling that some adult church members have a negative attitude towards the youth that manifests in criticism of their efforts. Another challenge was reported as a lack of leadership and management skills among the youth. The participating youth reported that this results in discrimination against some members and also an inability to resolve conflict successfully. A lack of leadership among the youth also, according to the participants, results in the fact that more young people are not becoming involved and interested in the CYM and that existing members are not committed to stay in the CYM. They reflected further on this aspect and explained that a lack of leadership and management results in poor programmes, or even a lack of programmes to direct youth activities. Similar to the children participants, the participating youth also noted the following contextual aspects that poses a challenge for the youth and youth ministries: Drug abuse, peer pressure, a lack of transport, dangerous environments to walk to the meetings and unwanted teenage pregnancies.

The reflections regarded the advantages and disadvantages/challenges of the CYM led to further discussions regarding *future expectations regarding youth ministry activities* within the church. The participating youth request that the focus on spiritual growth should be emphasised and that this should lead to an increase of young people serving the Lord. Related to this aspect, the participants requested that more prayer sessions and spiritual camps be arranged. The participants expressed the hope to, through Youth Ministry, “broaden our horizons”, which should empower them to become a living testimony for Christ and to serve as a model for young people. They also expressed a wish to learn to become faithful to God and to become active members of the church that hold hands with other Christians to

combat social issues and challenges in communities. A hope to be led to become proud of being youth for Christ and His Church and to become leaders in God was furthermore expressed. They focused on involvement in the CYM meetings on the one hand and on involvement in church services on the other hand. Regarding the CYM meetings, they proposed that the leadership skills among youth should lead to the development of effective programmes that will assist the youth to realise their gifts and talents and also the opportunity to develop this. They identified a youth band, a youth choir and dance and drama groups as initiatives to provide the youth with creative ways to express themselves and their spirituality. They also noted that the CYM programmes should make use of technology. With regards to involvement in church services, the participants expressed a need to become involved in the church services by means of a freedom to participate without being criticised. They continued to advise that each CYM branch should have a supporting church council member who will arrange contact and communication with other branches and that there should be a form of uniformity between branches, based on the youth's expectations. The participating youth also focused on the contextual challenges and reported a need to find a solution for transport problems (i.e. making the services accessible) and to include parents in activities to gain their support of the CYM. They continued to note that the youth ministry should encourage the youth to become involved in their communities by means of outreach programmes to old age homes, prisons, children's homes and so forth.

The participating youth expressed their *expectations of the child and youth facilitator and coordinator* in terms of the role of a spiritual mentor or guide. They expect the facilitator/coordinator to share Bible knowledge and to organise youth church-services. In addition, he/she should organise outreach programmes and outdoor church-services. They reported that the facilitator/coordinator should show commitment and dedication through participation in youth activities. He/she should, by means of modelling, lead and encourage youth to commit their lives to God. Regular contact with branches and members are needed. The facilitator/coordinator should assist youth leaders with the development and presentation of meaningful programmes, become aware of challenges and assist youth to address these challenges. Assistance to branches should also focus on fundraising. In terms of the coordinator role, the participating youth emphasised that he/

she should serve as the voice of young people amongst other ministers, churches and the presbytery. This also includes the coordination of effective communication between the youth, their families and church councils. Finally, they requested that social media be used to share the Word to encourage them and that the facilitator/coordinator continues to pray for them.

## **7. Conclusions and recommendations**

The conclusions, based on the above descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of the children and youth of the Presbytery of Wellington, will be described below, together with a literature control and recommendations. The conclusions and recommendations emanating from the data are as follows:

- Children and youth expressed a need to develop spiritually and to be engaged in Biblical teachings by means of creative, interactive and stimulating activities. Hendriks and Grobbelaar (2009b:363) raises the concern that junior and senior catechism takes on the form of classes, and therefore represents a 'school-like' experience. Weyers (2011:256-298) refers to community education aimed at, among others, the spiritual domain of individuals, groups and communities. Focusing on children and youth, dramatic enactments through artistic activities contribute to a learning experience in which the participants feel involved, resulting in a positive learning experience. It is recommended that creative activities such as choirs, drama groups and spiritual dance groups be used as a way of Biblical teaching to engage children and youth in the learning experience and to provide them with ways to express their spirituality.
- The participants reported that they are not included in the church-services and that this results in an experience that the services are boring and that they do not understand the message of the service. The church could be viewed as a mezzo system that has the power to develop the spiritual domain of individuals' well-being. The term 'individual' does not only refer to adult church members, but also to children and youth. During church services, the level of spiritual growth and engagement will depend on the level of collective

involvement in the service (Weyers 2011:251). Effective growth will therefore be encouraged by means of an environment that includes a “learning from each other” perspective. It is therefore recommended that the services include a component to actively involve children and youth and to encourage them to feel that they can participate and feel free to testify, pray and sing during church-services. This recommendation points to a move towards including Children and youth ministry not only as a separate service of the church, but as part of the church-services in general. The aim would be to prepare these young people to become active adult members of their congregations (cf. Flint et al., 2002:7; Strong 2014:1).

- The participants also referred to the need to develop leadership and management skills among the children and youth. With specific focus on youth, Van Rooi (2011:48-49) discusses the role and place of the CYM within URCSA and explains that it is a service organisation aimed at Christian Education in the church. The education should assist “church youth to become spiritual adult members of the body of Christ, who are competent in the doctrine, active in the mission, service and sacrifice”. It is recommended that these leadership skills should relate to the theology of the church and assist children and youth to become visible within the church and to prepare them for active participation and support of the church and its mission (cf. Knoetze 2015:1). This aspect was further emphasised by the fact that the participating youth expressed a need to become involved in social issues in their communities as part of service to God.
- Considering the contextual challenges expressed by the children and youth (cf. Cloete 2007; UNICEF 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2013; World Economic Forum, 2014), it is recommended that church leaders should become sensitive towards the challenges faced by these young people. Flint et al. (2002:29) describe the principles of services by the church and refers to, among others, empowering members (in this case children and youth) to deal with challenges, to assist them to develop a sense of purpose, to develop collective values and norms and to provide them with a space where trust, safety and a feeling of belonging could be experienced. The mentioned challenges often prohibit children and youth to actively participate (for instance the

inability to access transport to services and meetings) on the one hand, and it influences their emotional and spiritual well-being in that they are exposed to peer pressures (e.g. substance abuse and acceptability of teenage pregnancies) and a deviation from spiritual growth on the other hand.

- Both groups expressed a need to include parents in services to children and youth. The participating children explained that their parents' lack of involvement in the church influences their experiences of children ministries as they are not able to fully participate. Cloete (2013:2) discusses a family approach to youth ministry and concurs that parents are seen as indispensable partners in ministry as the church and church leaders cannot replace the primary role of the family context. The family is seen as the primary hermeneutical space where children and youth come to an understanding of themselves, others, the world and God. Children and youth programmes therefore cannot compete with the formative power of the parents at home. The recommendation is therefore that children and youth ministry should include family activities to stimulate parental insight and involvement to address the needs of children and youth. In further support of this Knoetze (2015:8) notes that "as the body of Christ the church must participate in creating opportunities to listen to each other within families".
- Children and youth ministries provide young people with an opportunity to socialise with other Christian peers and to develop a sense of belonging where they experience support and acceptance. This experience can contribute to betterment needs that are being addressed according to Hertnon's theory of universal human needs. Children and youth ministries can contribute to this aspect as children and youth are encouraged to participate in a Christian community where interactions are based on respect for others, valuing life and opportunities and doing good deeds for others. The aim is to integrate these values in identify formation and the development of a healthy self-image (Hertnon 2005). It is recommended that activities are aimed at developing relationships based on Christian values of respect, love and care for others. These



relationships could assist children and youth to develop a healthy sense of morality and a Christian identity.

- Related to the expressed need to develop healthy and supportive relationships with peers, the participating youth expressed a need to have contact with other CYM branches. Such contact should be aimed at networking between different congregations in an effort to develop a joint Christian culture among children and youth.

The authors of this article attempted to provide readers with a written picture of children and youth ministries as experienced and perceived by the children and youth themselves. This description is furthermore related to a specific context (i.e. the Presbytery of Wellington). However, it should be noted that the questions asked during the focus groups resulted in valuable data that provided a framework from which future children and youth ministry activities and services could draw on. It is therefore recommended that other presbyteries consider conducting similar research among their children and youth.

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