



Mission-Church Type for College Students: A Qualitative Research on Contextual Ministry in Urban Setting

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ABSTRACT

Yogyakarta, the designated research locus, is recognized as a leading student city, with a substantial academic community consisting of hundreds of universities and hundreds of thousands of students from various geographical locations throughout Indonesia. This condition gives rise to various social dynamics that must be addressed in relation to urgent spiritual issues. The students, who are new adults (18-25 years old) and the subjects of this study, often face a variety of social, emotional, and spiritual challenges associated with this age group's high rate of release in activities and communities of faith. As a result, there is an emerging need to provide related services that prioritize outreach to students, especially in the context of urban settings. This study uses a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach to examine the phenomenon of religious practice in a local church in Yogyakarta that has shown the capacity to develop socialization services for young people. The findings of this study show the importance of understanding the cognitive, social, and emotional development aspects of students as young adults. The personal perceptions and experiences of the study respondents highlighted the needs addressed during their involvement in the faith communities studied. These findings were then formulated into a mission-church-type model for reaching students in urban contexts. The model is based on the following: the adoption of an inclusive community model, the provision of dynamic discipleship, the delivery of relevant teaching, and the implementation of empowerment services.

Keywords: campus ministry, contextual ministry, emerging adulthood, missiology, urban ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

Statistically, according to the results of the National Socio-Economic Survey in 2022, the estimated number of youths (between 16 and 30 years old) is 65.82 million or almost a quarter of the total population of Indonesia (24.00%) (N. R. Sari et al., 2020). More specifically, youth in the 19-24 age group is 40.10% (the age group range of youth in higher education) and the 25-30 age group is 39.56%. Meanwhile, in the age group of 16-18 years, only about 20.34 percent of the youth (Direktorat Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat, 2022, pp. 9–12). Based on its geographic distribution, the percentage of youth in urban areas is greater than in rural areas (57.40% versus 42.60%). Moreover, for urban areas such as Jakarta the young population could reach more than 40%.

This reality presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the church. In particular, the city of Yogyakarta has been identified as a significant research locus, particularly in the area of youth ministry, which has been identified as a strategic mission area that requires additional effort. The city has been designated the "City of Students" due to its status as a prominent academic hub, with numerous universities and a significant student population (Kemendikbudristek, 2019). Yogyakarta functions as a melting pot, which gives rise to various dynamics, including contraction, segregation, friction, and a range of social phenomena within the urban context (Putri & Kiranantika, 2020, pp. 42–51; Rahma, 2018). Individuals who embark on academic pursuits from other islands and regions are frequently confronted with challenges related to cultural dissonance, a decline in academic motivation, and the facilitation of a rapid and unstructured adjustment process.

Research and reports indicate that cases of drug abuse, robbery, physical altercations, cohabitation, abortion, and nightlife frequently involve students from various regions who have come to Yogyakarta to pursue academic studies (Romadhon, 2021, pp. 6–38; Yadin, 2018, pp. 30–35). It is hypothesized that this vulnerability is also related to the social-emotional characteristics of young people at their stage of development. The abundance of options available has not been commensurate with the maturity of the cognitive and emotional considerations of the youth (Yadin, 2018). Consequently, individuals often prioritize tasks that are of immediate concern, while neglecting those that are of long-term importance. Faith communities and spiritual activities are frequently forsaken as a positive social support system, often due to their perceived inferior appeal in comparison to other pursuits (Y. Sari, 2021, pp. 75–81). This phenomenon merits attention, as it has been documented in various church ministry contexts worldwide.

The results of the *Bilangan Research Center* (BRC) study in 2018 revealed that about 8% of 399 respondents left the Church for some reason. 13.9% said the service was boring, and 11.2% could not find the community they wanted (Budijanto, 2018, pp. 3–5). These issues make ministry to youth in this age become vital. This developmental age is in a transitional period from adolescence to adulthood. According to Tagliabue (2016, pp. 374–388), this period is a stage of searching for various directions in life, such as study,

career, love, work, and worldview. This stage will determine the process of forming the most critical direction in life as they face many life choices.

This research looks at university students as the emerging adulthood group in the period of individual development from late adolescence to late twenties. Therefore, the characteristics, hallmarks, and ministry strategies to be developed will utilize the psychosocial developmental framework of youth aged 18–25 years. This developmental period is considered the most dynamic stage of human development. Individuals in this phase undergo significant transformations—physically, cognitively, and psycho-socio-emotionally—as they progress toward a more mature personality. Arnett (2000) identifies this stage as a distinct period characterized by identity exploration, instability, and self-focus, marking it as a unique phase in the life span. Erik Erikson (1968) describes this stage as the crisis of "intimacy versus isolation," wherein young adults strive to form meaningful relationships while solidifying their personal identities. Failure to establish intimacy can lead to social isolation and emotional distress. Moreover, this period is characterized by adjustments to new life patterns and social expectations, making it a time replete with challenges and uncertainties (Myers & DeWall, 2014). Decisions made during this stage often have long-lasting impacts, underscoring the importance of supportive frameworks that address the unique needs of emerging adults. As a response, the church must make the best use of the time to seriously think about strategies and approaches to reach and nurture the faith of this group.

Arnett (2000) identified five characteristics of a person in the emerging adulthood period, namely: Identity explorations, Instability, Being self-focused, Feeling in between and in transition, and Possibilities. As an identity exploration stage, an individual will seek and explore identity to prepare him to enter the next phase of life. More recent elaboration from Arnett (2023, p. 469) explains that individuals in this period are engaging in exploring various possibilities in love, work, and worldviews to develop a clearer sense of self. Tagliabue et al. (2016) add that this period involves trying out different roles and making decisions that shape one's adult identity. This stage is also marked by frequent changes in relationships, jobs, and living situations. Such instability reflects the exploration process and the search for a suitable life path. Within this process, emerging adult agers adopt a sense of identity in several domains, such as political preference, religious orientation, gender and sexuality, and ethnicity (Meca et al., 2015). But at the same time, they are in a period of instability. They are doubts and indecision when starting to try all kinds of things around them. Feeling in uncertainty dealing with the future often makes them unstable.

Individuals who enter this stage will be in the self-focused period. This is a period of transition from adolescence to adulthood. In the past, they were more dependent and involved with other people (parents), but at this stage they are more independent. They are encouraged to focus more on meeting their own needs, have career and academic

achievements, build intimate and deep interpersonal relationships, make their own decisions and have emotional maturity. As Munson (2013) as Arnett (2018) describe, emerging adults often prioritize personal development and self-understanding, focusing on themselves to prepare for future commitments and responsibilities.

The next characteristic is feeling in between and in transition. Santrock (2011, 2019) added that the youth experienced a physical, intellectual, and social role transition at this time. This condition is often interpreted as a period full of challenges. On the one hand, they are required to become adults, such as being financially independent, but on the other hand, they have not been able to meet several criteria to become adults because they are still not fully mature. Many opportunities are available but also often create doubts in making choices (Jatmiko, 2020b; Tagliabue et al., 2016).

The final characteristic of emerging adulthood is a period marked by Possibilities. At this time, they have many open opportunities, such as education, work, life partner, and philosophy of life. It is a stage filled with great hope and expectation for the future. But on the other hand, modernization and technological advances create intense expectations and competition, contributing to the life burden (Murphy, 2011, p. 5).

Various studies have been done on this topic. Pilemon Bukit (2022, pp. 1–13) in his study explains the ministry to the university student age group as a partnership mission strategy. Although he does not delve deeply into the mental and emotional development characteristics of this age group, Bukit (2022) agrees that this group needs to be ministered as a potential group in the expansion of the mission of preaching the gospel. In line with the rationale of Bukit's discussion, Hutasoit (2024, pp. 24–36) also sees the need to minister to the young adult group because of their potential as future leaders. The next study conducted by Aprina (2022) is related to the approach that needs to be taken to minister young adults given the fact that it is difficult for this group to be involved in various church activities. Aprina (2022) describes that the ways that can be done to engage young adults are through catechism class and small group (cell group) meetings.

With respect to the practice of ministry in an urban environment, previous discussions have centered on the theological concept of urban ministry itself. Rampengan's (2023, pp. 809–820) argument posits that the church and urban ministry serve as sites of God's hospitality, extending welcome to all individuals. This notion was exemplified by Hendrik (2019) in his research in one of the cities in East Nusa Tenggara in relation to youth ministry. He underscores the findings in the form of constraints and factual conditions of youth outreach challenges in the urban context. In response, he proposes a church model that is conducive to the needs of urban youth, namely the church as a welcoming, secure, and nurturing environment (Hendrik, 2019). Bali (2023, pp. 845–856) conceptualizes the urban ministry as a conduit for manifesting divine mercy and an agent of social transformation, particularly in contexts characterized by economic disadvantage and diverse urban challenges. In addition to these studies, Tinangon and

Purba (2024, pp. 29–40) propose a humanist approach, emphasizing friendship, as a strategy in evangelism in urban ministry. The present study posits that urban ministries should endeavor to adopt a friendly and relevant approach. In a manner similar to Jesus's provision of answers to various human problems, urban ministry must also be characterized by a holistic form of ministry.

In comparison to those previous studies, this research aims to address a notable gap by integrating concepts from developmental psychology, demographic studies, and urban missiology. Developmental theory, particularly the emerging adulthood framework proposed by Arnett, Erikson, Santrock and other developmentalists emphasize the unique transitional period experienced by individuals aged 18-25, characterized by identity exploration, instability, and self-focus. Recognizing these developmental characteristics is crucial for understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by emerging adults, especially in urban contexts. Through this approach, it is hoped that the study will contribute to the development of suitable strategies for mission in a local church that has a calling to reach out to the younger generation. The proposed strategies are designed to support the outreach ministry of college students in urban settings, where emerging adults are actively navigating key life decisions related to career, relationships, and spiritual identity.

METHOD

This research utilizes qualitative research methods to understand the reality of a social phenomenon (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Researchers utilize a phenomenological research approach to find the meaning and value of a phenomenon (Chariri, 2009). Given that phenomenological research seeks to understand the lived experiences and personal perceptions of participants, this approach is particularly suitable for examining the nuances of spiritual engagement and disconnection among young adults in a religious context. By employing a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach, the research effectively captures the subjective experiences of young people regarding religious practice in a local church in Yogyakarta that has demonstrated capacity to develop outreach services for young people.

The data sources in this study were strategically selected to align with the research objective, focusing on understanding the preferences of university students within the youth age group regarding their engagement with a local church in an urban context. The primary data source consisted of in-depth interviews with eight university students actively involved in the youth ministry at Filadelfia Church of the Nazarene in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The inclusion criteria for participants were established to ensure that the data collected represented the perspectives of those who are not only affiliated with the church but also actively participate in its youth ministry programs.

To validate the data, the study employed triangulation by cross-referencing the interview findings with administrative records obtained from the church. These records included data on youth ministry activities, attendance, and program participation. This triangulation method enhances the credibility of the findings by comparing subjective narratives with objective administrative data, ensuring that the reported experiences align with documented evidence.

The data analysis followed a systematic coding process using Atlas.ti software, encompassing three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open Coding is initial phase involved breaking down the transcribed interview data into discrete parts to identify significant concepts and categories. Each segment of data was examined line by line to uncover patterns and themes emerging directly from the participants' narratives. Axial Coding is the stage that focus to identifying relationships between the categories developed during open coding. The aim was to reassemble the data in new ways by establishing connections between categories, subcategories, and their properties, thus providing a deeper understanding of the context and conditions influencing the phenomenon. The final phase; Selective Coding involved integrating and refining the categories to form a coherent narrative that encapsulates the core phenomenon of the study. This process entailed selecting the central category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development. By employing this rigorous coding process, the study was able to distil complex qualitative data into meaningful insights, aligning with the objectives of phenomenological research to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Context and Etic Point of View of the Research Finding

Demographic Context of the Research Locus

The research is conducted in Filadelfia Church of the Nazarene, located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Since the church was organized in 1983, most visitors to this church are young people. From the data collected, the average attendance at each service (January – October 2022) is 488 attendees, and 78.4% are college students (18-25 years) of several campuses situated around this church (Filadelfia Church of the Nazarene, 2022). In other words, the majority of the congregation in this church are those who fall into the emerging adult age group (Arnett, 2000).

Yogyakarta (Special Region of Yogyakarta) is one of 38 provinces in Indonesia and is located on the island of Java. Geographically, the Special Region of Yogyakarta is located between 7°.33' - 8°.12' South latitude and 110°.00' - 110°.50' East longitude. The

province has an area of 3,185.80 km² or 0.17 percent of Indonesia (1,860,359.67 km²) or one of the smallest provinces after Jakarta. Yogyakarta has only four regencies and one municipality: Kulonprogo Regency, Bantul Regency, Gunungkidul Regency, Sleman Regency, and the municipality of Yogyakarta.

The demographics of the Yogyakarta province influence the characteristics of the congregation of this church. Even though it is only a small province, Yogyakarta is home to 3.8 million population. It is also the base of more than one hundred of higher education institutions in Indonesia, attracting ten of thousand students come to this city to pursue their degrees every year (*BPS Provinsi D.I. Yogyakarta*, 2023). The presence of these students contributed to this city's socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Rafidi Septa, a Member of the Board of Trustees of the Indonesian Young Entrepreneurs Association for the region of Yogyakarta (DIY), estimates the economic potential owned by all students in Yogyakarta reaches 10.4% of the Yogyakarta Special Region's Gross Regional Domestic Product (Bayu, 2020; Sunarto, 2023).

But on the other hand, as mentioned in the introduction section, Yogyakarta has become a melting pot of society prone to social problems such as cultural conflicts between students or students and the locals (Yadin, 2018). Some other social issues involving them are drug abuse, alcoholism, cohabitation, online prostitution, and many other crimes. Reaching out to college students is one of the efforts to facilitate social transformation in this city and beyond. Therefore, in the next session, several efforts to reach youth will be discussed as to what programs are being carried out in fostering spiritual formation among college students attending the Church.

Etic Point of View on the Youth Ministry at Filadelfia Church

The youth ministry in the Church called Filadelfia Youth Fellowship (FYLL). Various programs are implemented in a planned manner. Several programs are presented to address the needs of this age group to help them grow spiritually. Various activities segmented specifically for youths show the importance of a supportive environment toward spiritual growth. ISA, one of the respondents, shared the heartwarming story of how his faith deepened and flourished as he joined FYLL. "In FYLL, I was guided to understand God's love more deeply," he said. "I was encouraged to deeply embrace my faith, love others, forgive, and live with spiritual discipline through prayer, reading God's Word, and being active in ministry" (Respondent A, 2022).

This faith community presents to convey not only solid teaching and worship, but also fellowship and empowerment. This principle is very much in line with the maturing process of faith applied among the early Christians. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." These things make FYLL a faith community oriented towards the growth its members.

This faith community has become a “second home” for students from various backgrounds. Studying at many different campuses in Yogyakarta, the young people who join FYLL come from different islands and tribes, languages and backgrounds. In many occasions, they struggle to overcome cultural differences and feelings of inferiority when socializing in a new place. A community that provides acceptance is needed, considering the complexity of the struggles during emerging adulthood and the culture shock they faced while studying in this city.

The Filadelfia Church, as a multiethnic church, presents acceptance for young people regardless of their background. This diversity within the faith community makes everyone welcome. There is no different treatment because of skin color, ethnic language, or tribe. They are welcomed and accepted as brothers and sisters, visited, loved, cared for, and encouraged to grow. DS, a student from North Sumatra, shared that her experience in FYLL opened her eyes to the beauty of diversity and acceptance. She said, “Before I came to this city, I had a few misconceptions about people from different ethnic groups. But in FYLL, I learned to appreciate the value of every individual, to see them as equal and loved” (Respondent C, 2022). These practices are particularly important for young people in the process of self-development and seeking acceptance.

Faith communities have an essential role for students who live apart from their families. Many temptations can lead them to all kinds of evil and immoral acts. This urgency was answered by being present for the youth as a healthy community. When they are among people who share the same values, young people are kept from being trapped by the bad behavior around them (1 Cor. 15:33-34).

The situation in the social demographic context in Yogyakarta makes various FYLL programs actual and relevant to the spiritual needs of youth. In this community, they are taught to understand God's will for them do not get entangled in various misleading habits (Rom. 12:1). God's Word will give the wisdom to discern what is right and what God's will be (Rom. 12:2). God's truth will guide young people to live worthy before God (1 Cor. 10:31).

FYLL does not only help young people in the spiritual dimension, it is also seeks to help young people develop in other areas of their lives. Discipleship groups are also places where young people get help in their studies apart from being an accountability community. Group leaders and group members who are also students have an essential role in providing motivation and guidance regarding the obstacles they face in their studies.

FYLL's training and fellowship programs also address the need for self-actualization, one of the emerging adulthood age group's characteristics. FYLL provides a platform for youth to explore their interests and abilities through the training programs provided. FYLL sports is offered for those who have an interest in sports, FYLL Class is provided for those who are interested in music. At the same time, Multimedia Class will help young people develop themselves in photography, videography, design, and sound

system. One of the respondents of this research asserts that he enjoyed being part of the Filadelfia community because there were many opportunities to develop his talents and interests (Respondent B, 2022). As a student from the remote area (one of the islands in the eastern part of Indonesia), he sees that the opportunity to learn to play music is something he has always wanted. This desire was met when he became a part of FYLL.

This was supported by another respondent (a student at a state university in Jogja, majoring in visual communication) who said that her interest was “facilitated” by the church through multimedia training and the opportunity to practice directly with various multimedia equipment while involved in ministry (Respondent D, 2022). This experience was valuable because she did not have this opportunity while studying on campus.

However, there are notes that the FYLL ministry can pay attention to regarding the orientation and objectives of the various programs being implemented. There are more inner-oriented programs within the FYLL ministry. Most of the programs are exclusive within the church and for the youth. Programs need to be more inclusive to reach youth outside the community. The maturity of faith requires an external context. Youth need to be connected to real contexts – how loyalty is relevant in real life, on campus, or in hangouts. The focus of transformative ministry needs to be changed, not just bringing people to church but the church to people.

Each program must have implications for funds and budget. From the interview, it appears that FYLL programs are high-cost programs. When some of the FYLL service approach models are to be duplicated, financial capacity and resources will be the main obstacle for several other youth services in other places. It is undeniable that multimedia facilities, musical instruments, and varied programs will be costly.

In addition, various programs run by FYLL require the ability to determine priorities well, especially for board members. Students have many responsibilities related to their studies and personal life. Programs in the church seem to take time and attention to implement. It is feared that students will lose their focus and priorities if there is no good management capacity and precise control.

Proposing Mission-Church Type for College Students in Urban Setting

By understanding the characteristics of college students and the field study of the research locus, this section will present a pattern of ministry that focus on outreach to youth groups in an urban context. The study found that ministering to young people requires appropriate strategies and approaches. The following are some suggested strategies that could be implemented.

The Church as an Inclusive Community

The period of emerging adulthood is often a period that presents doubts in the process of identity exploration. Freedom of self-exploration provides its own pressure

because individuals have not been able to determine their future direction (Baggio et al., 2017; Verschueren et al., 2017). The combination of emotions about freedom, confusion, rejection from the environment and various other emotions make them confused and headed in unclear directions (Carman, 2008, pp. 31–33). The choices they make are often incomprehensible to the world around them. This leads them to experience a crisis of confidence and identity. In this situation they need support and affirmation from the people around them. Harlock said that value changes occur at this time, they want to be accepted in the social and economic groups of adults (Hurlock, 1999).

Erikson's theory says that individuals during this period also experience psychosocial development characterized by intimacy versus isolation. This is evident in the emergence of feelings and thoughts to make commitments and build relationships (Monks et al., 2001). At this time, young people also enter a period to develop warm, close, and communicative relationships with or without sexual contact (Schwartz et al., 2015, pp. 307–317). If intimacy fails, he will experience isolation (feeling left out from other people, lonely, and blaming himself for being different from others). This need is answered by the presence of an inclusive community that can accept and provides support for someone during this developmental period.

As a faith community, the church has a vital role in this stage. Kuther (2018, pp. 397–399) says that religious identity is one of the domains in this age group's internalization and self-identification process. They become interested in prayer, community service, and meditation when they find a community that matches their expectations (Schwartz et al., 2015). This community will become the “congregation of one” as Arnett and Jensen (2002) use to refer to the individualized belief systems among emerging adults.

A community of faith must be inclusive so that it can become a place where all are accepted and treated like brothers and family in God (Jatmiko et al., 2021, pp. 234–253). In this community, members learn to practice family relationships in the form of caring for one another, brotherly love, a sense of belonging, a sense of mutual care for one another and to become a place to practice the fruits of godliness (Eph. 2:19 ; Eccl. 4:9-12).

Dynamic Discipleship

Over time, emerging adult agers have experienced many changes in the plans that have been prepared. According to Harlock, this stage is a period of trouble and various tensions (social and emotional) that requires a person to make many adjustments (Hurlock, 1999). Kuther (2018, pp. 388–396) adds that various challenges and struggles for young adults occur because various demands to be more mature and independent

(establishing relationships, social and financial independence, career, etc.) are received when they are not fully prepared. After all, they are just forming their identities.

In this situation, dynamic Discipleship will be a place for them to find help amid confusion and adversity. The discipleship group, as an accountability community, allows people to talk openly about all their struggles and problems. Openness is the beginning of the presence of help and reinforcement from group members on the same journey and struggle. Within this group, there is also a discipleship leader capable of directing and being an example to its members.

Discipleship is not just programs and activities but is the DNA of believers as stated in the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20). The discipleship will also encourage young people to become militant and committed Christians (Benson & Senter III, 1999). Jesus' disciples have a lifetime commitment to follow Him. Discipleship talks about each individual's commitment to knowing Jesus and following the footsteps He left behind (Grady, 2022; Onyinah, 2017, pp. 216–227).

Young people must be taught to live as followers of Christ – not just to worship, read the Bible and pray while at church on Sundays. Discipleship is related to spiritual discipline and obedience to God's will. With discipleship spiritual babies are guided and directed to become more mature. This is what is called dynamic discipleship. Indeed, this is not talking about a short and limited time period. Discipleship is a lifelong journey to become more and more like Christ.

Relevant Teaching

In emerging adulthood, the body's functions are fully developed, and cognitive abilities are formed to become more complex. Wood and associates assert that this period may be sensitive periods of brain development (Wood et al., 2018, pp. 123–143). The brain continues to grow, and individuals begin to apply their knowledge and analytical skills. According to Piaget's (1972) theory, there are significant differences between individuals this age and adolescents thinking. Their cognitive abilities are developed and able to adapt to various changes. They can engage in pragmatic aspects and also demonstrate excellent logical thinking skills.

Patton et al assert that at this stage, individuals will experience cognitive development in their worldviews (Patton et al., 2016, pp. 323–382; Tanner & Arnett, 2016, pp. 50–56). This period is also a time to re-evaluate beliefs and attitudes that have been adhered to from childhood to adolescence. Smith (2006, pp. 13–34) finds that young people who enter campus life will encounter various notions, such as pluralism, individualism, and hedonism, also the offer of free life, such as pornography and drugs. Socialization and diverse experiences provide opportunities for them to have cognitive experiences by discovering different thoughts and worldviews. Valle (2015, p. 112) states that in this stage individuals in this stage dissociation may be occurs. During this period,

a person often chooses to follow a new worldview in terms of beliefs and attitudes (Perry, 1999).

These experiences present a variety of dilemmas, struggles, and questions that differ from those of teenagers and adults. Schwartz revealed that emerging adult agers tend to engage in more intimate and smaller groups rather than attending church services (Meca et al., 2015). In this setting they feel more comfortable and effective in finding answers to the questions they are struggling with. This needs to be an important note for the church. The emerging adults' anxiety needs to be answered with relevant and actual teaching in an appropriate approach. If not, they will look for answers elsewhere, which may not follow the Christian faith's truth.

God's Word and sound teaching must be emphasized. They need to be taught with appropriate instructions so that they remain in the truth (Prov. 22:6). God's Word will help young people to live truthful life (Ps. 119: 9). Categorical services for young people are carried out so that they receive teaching that suits their needs and level of development. Faith comes and grows in hearing the Word (Rom. 10:17). This is important to help young people grow in Christ and be firmly rooted in Him (Jn. 8:32; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Empowering Ministry

The period of emerging adulthood is also known as the quarter-life crisis (QLC) (Murphy, 2011). This period becomes fundamental as well as risky. Wood and others state that in emerging adulthood stage, individuals are facing conditions that have significant self-management burden (Wood et al., 2018). They are very burdened with plans and choices for the future. Some problems that often become a burden are related to studies, careers, finances, and social life. The reactions that arise from each individual facing adulthood are very diverse, some are enthusiastic, and some are afraid. Some can easily overcome this phase and move on, but others are confused and need help. Individuals who do not go through this phase well may feel helpless. This situation is a crisis that must be overcome.

According to Robinson, during the QLC period, an individual needs direction to get out of a condition that often becomes a "situation trap." They need help to have alternatives to control their life goals' direction. In a confusing situation, they must be encouraged to try new things and focus more on their interests and values (Robinson, 2015, pp. 17–30). When they don't get enough good direction, young people try to experiment with the desire to be recognized as group members. This action becomes the starting point for risky behavior (self-affirmation) for individuals in emerging adulthood (Akbar & Susilowati, 2019, pp. 218–238).

The nurturing process for emerging adult groups needs to be carried out with empowering ministry that touches the holistic aspect of the human being. The church is called to realize holistic ministry by optimizing the various potentials and capacities

within it (Jatmiko, 2020a). Ted Ward's (1995) human hand illustration identifies the six dimensions that present the human person as an ecological system of human development. He asserts that five empirical domains of human development - physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral- serve as input and output functions to and from the spiritual core (Ward, 1995). This approach is referred to by Lanctot and Poulin (2018, pp. 91–103) as a person-centered approach. This implies that each individual must be regarded as a holistic entity, considering all the dimensions that contribute to their unique identity.

Spiritual formation includes the individual aspects of each person. Estep and Kim (2010, pp. 264–265) asserts that spiritual development is the central integrating dimension of human personhood - nested among other developmental capacities, all partaking of the same developmental patterns of growth. A holistic approach to spiritual formation cannot ignore or neglect any of the six aspects of the faith-nurturing process. Thus, the five elements of the human person must be nurtured and developed for a person to grow toward spiritual maturity and a stature measured by Christ's fullness (Eph. 4:13).

This concept can be conveyed by providing a platform for them to be involved and developed holistically. This model of ministry refers to the ministry of Jesus himself. Jesus preached the Good News to the poor, proclaimed release for the captives, healed the sick, freed the oppressed (Lk. 4:18-19), gave food to the hungry (Mrk. 8:1-10; Matt.15:32-39), restored the souls of people possessed by evil spirits in Gerasa (Matt. 8:28-34; Mrk.5:1-18; Lk. 8:26-37), even He identified Himself as hungry, sick, thirsty, naked, imprisoned and a stranger (Matt. 25:31-46) (Grady, 2022; Rooney & Donald, 2015; Stott, 2013).

The church must be present to help them grow by learning to lead, contribute and minister (play music, lead worship, teach, speak, give testimony, etc.). This need represents a call for the church to be not only an adaptive church, but also an adoptive church (Clark, 2018). As Robinson (2015)says, young people in this period seek to develop new foundations and deepen their interests by having opportunities to be equipped and mentored. In addition to providing theological training and a spiritual experience of nature, the church is also expected to be a place for the development of life skills according to the interests of the youth (Akkerman & Bakker, 2019, pp. 1–24; Nel & Moser, 2019, pp. 1–8; Newman, 2020, pp. 489–519). The faith community needs to present training, teaching, workshops, counseling, coaching, and mentoring that is not only about faith and the Bible; but also, about issues of self-development such as health, time, money, conflict management, and soft skills development, such as music, multimedia, leadership, cooking, foreign languages, dance, art, and so on.

Peter advises the congregation to serve one another (1 Pet. 10:10-14). The description of the early church shows a mature faith actualized in their involvement (Acts 2;4). As the body of Christ, the congregation must provide affirmation, support, and

appreciation for this group to strengthen their psychosocial and spiritual “muscles” (1 Thess. 5:11).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that special strategies and approaches are needed for a church to continue to be effective in reaching and discipling college students. Previous ways and methods may have been effective in their time, but may not be effective in the present. Therefore, churches, especially in the urban context, need to innovate and conduct strategic inquiry in order to keep their ministries relevant and effective in discipling each generation. This research reminds the church of the opportunities to reach college students (who are part of the younger age group that is often seen as more “secular” than previous generations). Urban churches need to begin to be inclusive communities that foster acceptance and openness, promote dynamic and engaging discipleship, teach in a way that touches and responds, and provide space for young people to explore and realize their interests, talents and gifts.

Competing interests

The author declares that there are no financial, personal, or professional competing interests that could have influenced the research reported in this article. This study was conducted solely for academic purposes, with no external influence or conflict of interest involved.

Author contributions

BJ. conceptualization, methodology, writing – original draft, correspondence.

CST. review & editing (content, flow, and systematic arrangement).

SEEK. data collection, data analysis, review & editing (final proofreading).

Ethical considerations

This study involving human participants was conducted in compliance with institutional and international ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, and strict confidentiality of respondents’ data. No animals or environmental subjects were involved in this research, and therefore, no additional ethical approval was required in those areas. Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the ethical committee of Indonesia Nazarene Theological College, Yogyakarta, with reference number: 1466/IX/STTNI/2025.

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Data availability

The data used in this research were obtained from Filadelfia Church of the Nazarene, Yogyakarta, as well as from other academic resources. All data were collected and analyzed in accordance with ethical academic

procedures, with full acknowledgement and proper citation of every external source used in the article. Due to confidentiality considerations and the nature of qualitative data, raw data from the church community are not publicly available but may be provided by the author upon reasonable request for academic purposes.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author(s) and are the result of independent academic research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funding body, agency, or the publisher. The author(s) take full responsibility for the study's findings, interpretations, and content.

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