

**DREW UNIVERSITY**

**RESTORING INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG ADULT  
TONGANS IN THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF  
SAN BRUNO, CALIFORNIA**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM IN  
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the participation of young adults, or lack of it, in the Tongan Church in America. Tonga is a South Sea Island land, and for a variety of reasons many of its citizens have found themselves immigrants in the California area of the U.S.A. They have settled, sought productive work, and have slowly become a part of the U.S. culture. They formed many new congregations, and one of them is the site of this study, First United Methodist Church of San Bruno, California

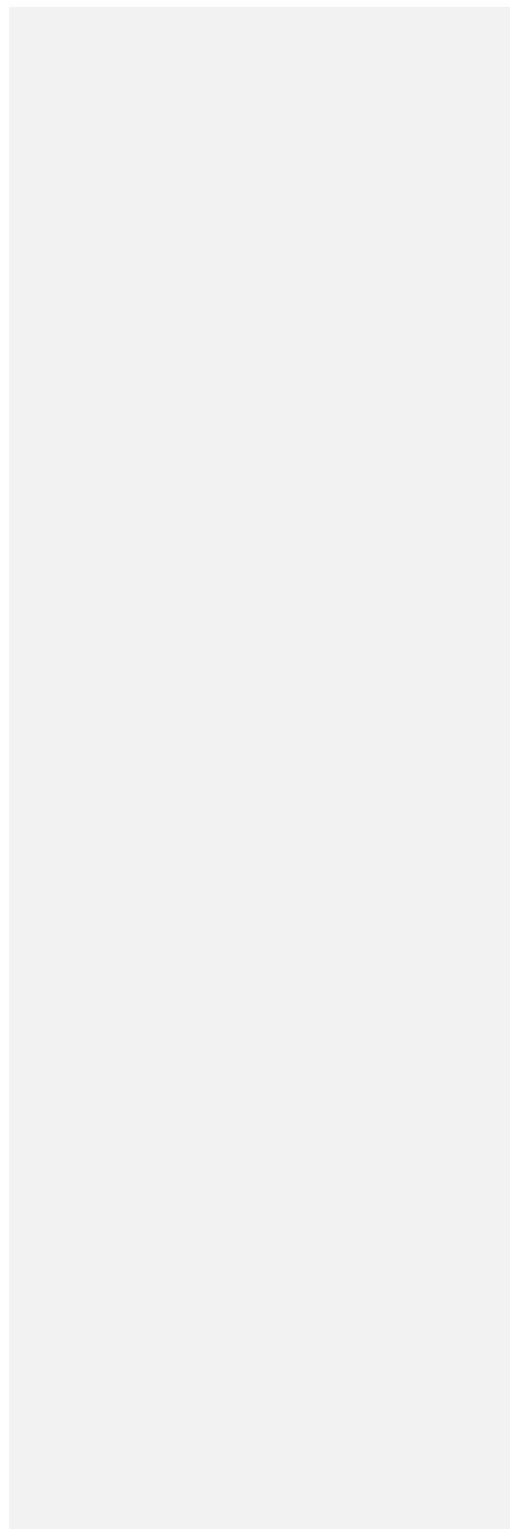
The researcher and pastor of this church surmised that Young adult Tongans were increasingly feeling alienated from the congregation, and that their participation was diminishing, though their parents remained loyal. This was causing concern among members, who saw the next generation of Christian disciples in peril. Theologically, they were concerned about the possible spiritual alienation from God and the Christian tradition this represented. They worried about the spiritual and social implications of a new generation whose Christian identity and connection to Christian fellowship was being lost, and what more might be done to reach out to them with hospitality and spiritual challenge.

This project is an in-depth research-based study of the social, economic, cultural and religious reasons why Tongan and other young adults are losing interest in the Church. The hope of the congregation is that it serves as a preliminary to re-engaging them with a realistic plan of biblically-based inclusiveness and hospitality. The research entailed forming two focus groups of young persons to gather ideas and content for a questionnaire that was to be administered to around 350 young adults in the parish area by trained project staff.

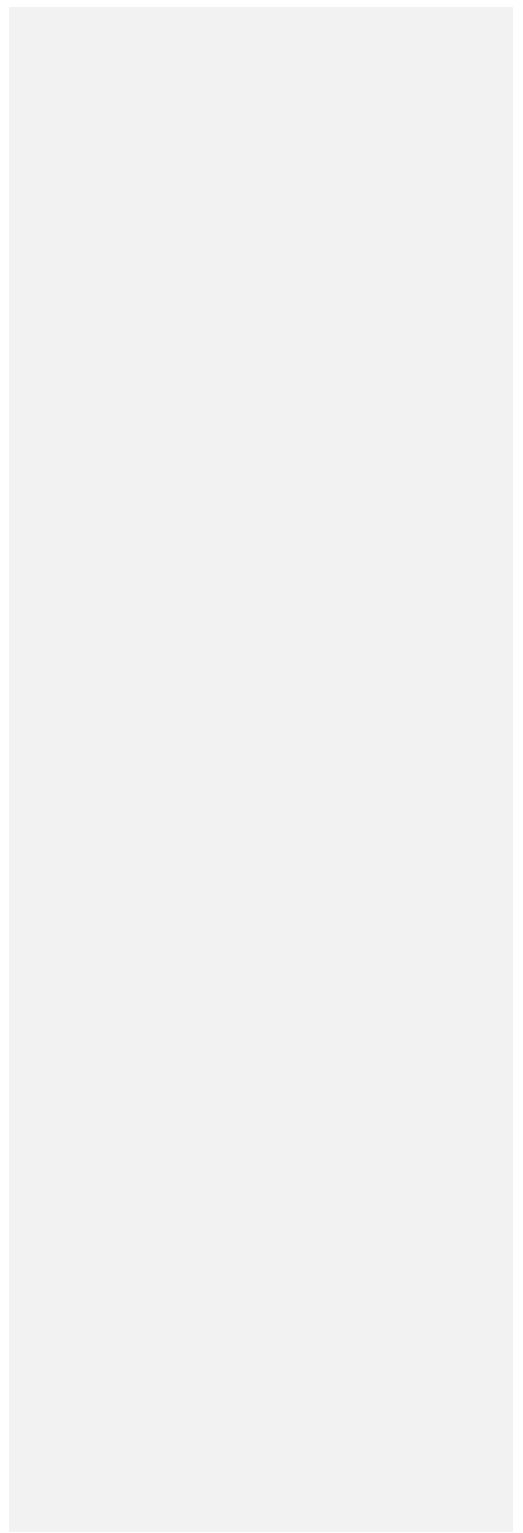
Working closely with a Lay Advisory Committee, the questionnaires were filled out in face-to-face interviews in person or online. The data were collated and a narrative methodology was chosen as a means of presenting the findings. Narrative themes revealed, among other things, that young adults were feeling alienated because they had no voice or role in planning worship, study, and cultural activities; that they were aggrieved that there was no effort to provide an English language worship service; that they felt the older generations did not appreciate the tension they feel around the clash of their old culture and new one; that their hesitancy about church was partly driven by economic perceptions; gang influence; and that their preferred time schedule clashed with the congregation's. Coconut theology, a contextually-based theology, was used to interpret the findings theologically.

The study provided a dramatic awakening among the leadership of the church. An English language service was established. Young adults were incorporated into key

positions of leadership and influence. A significant outreach project was initiated and staffed by young adults. An increase in participation of young adults was realized. Other persons of Tongan heritage began to attend the English service. The congregation became more alive, aware of the future course of ministry and service to which God is leading them.



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**INTRODUCTION:  
REACHING YOUNG ADULT TONGAN PEOPLE: RESHAPING THE  
PROBLEM TO BECOME AN OPPORTUNITY**

**Ministry of Image**

Tonga, an island territory whose population was 106,000 in 2015, is located around two-thirds of the distance between Hawaii and New Zealand. It is known as the Oceania archipelago of the South Pacific Ocean. Often referred to as the “Friendly Islands,” Tonga became a united kingdom in 1845, a constitutional monarchy in 1875, and a British protectorate in 1900. Withdrawing from the protectorate, it joined the Commonwealth of Nations in 1970. It is now a constitutional monarchy. Tonga has a diverse economy, spread mostly over tourism, agriculture, and fishing. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are a continuing feature of life.<sup>1</sup>

Growing up as a kid in Tonga, I formed a deep impression of how the young people would have a solid and strong church support system. I witnessed with my own eyes that many groups of young adults were active in sharing and contributing their gifts and talents to the church.

On Sundays, young people would lead our traditional worship with the brass band. They played for all four of the typical worship services. At age of ten, I took on the opportunity to visit other religious denominations in our village. There, too, I noticed that in all the churches, the young people would attend service every Sunday and would

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<sup>1</sup> U.S Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, Office of Publications, Washington. Website <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tn.html>



participate in the youth programs. This later inspired me to move forward and inspire younger audiences to participate like the Tongan youth of my early upbringing. I pictured clearly in my mind how committed and involved the young people would be in my local church. Young people's influence in the church would be very engaging and strong willed, allowing them to be comfortable in a church environment.

Throughout my formative years, I had many opportunities to visit at least ten other churches out of the hundreds of islands in Tonga. Each church appeared to share the same systemic structure which involved both the elders and younger members. The young people were deeply involved in both worship and activities. For example, the church choir consisted of members of all ages: young adults and adolescents sang high pitched solos while their mothers sang alto. Every time they had a gathering for outdoor activities, I noticed a hierarchy: the adults came together making plans and organizing many activities while the young adults and youth performed them.

Though at the time I was not yet a teenager, this image stayed with me throughout my life. As I became older, I shared this observation with my parents who explained that this was a type of education system in Tonga before the missionaries first arrived in the 1800s. This hierarchical system was the way we would pass our experience and knowledge to the new generation. Now that I'm in America, and serving as a pastor, I find myself revisiting this system to determine the benefits and disadvantages of how this system functions.

Back then on the island and still till this day, the residents belong to a local church where they attend Sunday services. Typically, if parents attend the church, so do the children. This point of view is much like a family tradition. This system teaches both

Parents and children to honor their family heritage. Our island's way of life and cultural traditions are deeply embedded into the minds of Tongan people. Of course, in America the older generations carried forth and were expected to continue this tradition. Tongan youth and the adolescents would be expected to strongly support their local churches. I was born into a United Methodist Church family which in Tonga is called "Siasi Uesiliana Tau'atina 'o Tonga." It was a rule in my parent's house for children to not to marry a Mormon or Catholic. Both these religions believed that the husband must remain strong and faithful to the doctrines of their local church. As a result, they might disregard and jeopardize the continuity of Tongan belief systems.

### **Change Arrived**

I was baptized in a Methodist Church and started to become involved with church activities at an early age. At around ten years of age, I recognized that my grandparents were our "prayer warriors." My household was the first school for my spiritual life. We had a family devotion every day except Sunday, when we attended church. Our first service started at six a.m. in the morning and closed with an evening devotion before everybody went to sleep. That image was instilled in my mind and was never taken away from me. I experienced the importance of growing up with a family who were faithful and practiced a Christian life. According to Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."<sup>2</sup> Whenever I visited my mom's family, I noticed how committed they were and they never failed to demonstrate how to be strong Christians.

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2. Prov.22: 6 (KJV).

When it was time to attend Middle School and High School, my parents sent me to Tupou College, a United Methodist Boarding School in Tonga. Though I had moved to a bigger Island for school, I never forgot my early teachings, as well as my beliefs from the local church back on the island of Ha'apai. Similar to a normal household in Tonga, the church catered to a diverse following of old and young people. This helped me understand why I was becoming more dedicated and stronger and why I needed to commit to my original church rather than this local branch or another system entirely. I followed in my father's footsteps by attending the same school. While at Tupou College, I found out that the students who eventually provided the backbone of all youth church leaders from the United Methodist Church in Tonga, had also attended Tupou College. Tupou College's main purpose was to teach students to serve the church and understand the importance of having a relationship with Jesus Christ who was our Savior and Redeemer.

A few years later, after returning to my family home, I was twenty-two years of age. I became a Lay Speaker of my local church in our home town. My father was a Lay Speaker also, but I discovered how crucial the image was for young adults to lead by example. I was sharp in the eyes of my family. I have always sought to carry out the family tradition of Christian service to others. Outside of my family, this tradition meant assuming responsibility for young people, supporting the church, and making a difference in other peoples lives. Everywhere I went, whether it was my home town or in other islands of Tonga, my purpose was to impact someone's life. The power of these

expectations from my family and church traditions has made me see why Tongan young people today struggle to fulfill that image.

### **High Tide Comes In**

Growing up in the developing land of Tonga, the national and local economy impacted our daily lives. The majority of religions were Methodist, Catholic, Church of England, Church of Tonga, and The Noble church of Tonga. Everyone grew up and already belonged to one of the above-mentioned churches. When a new type of congregation arrived in Tonga, I observed how they reached out to the Tongan people but many already belonged to their local church. These new outreaches targeted the economic situation of households because the country was in a state of emergency. During my younger years Tonga experienced many economic hardships. Some families struggled for several years to pay tuition for their children's education and could barely afford the necessities to live comfortably.

Because of the financial turmoil, Tongan people looked to other religious groups for help. The missionaries from the Mormon Church would distribute supplies and daily household items for families in need. Some families converted to Mormonism or other new church groups because they were attracted to their outreach programs at the time. Different religions other than Methodist had programs for those who couldn't afford to pay their children's tuition or meet daily needs for household supplies and food. I started to see young people leave their parents' church. The traditional image of what I was accustomed to seeing started to shift. Young people were being affected by the new church requirements and regulations insisted upon by their newly chosen communities.

What was very interesting was that some children baptized by Mormon missionaries tried to convince their parents change churches. The unity of the family, culture and tradition was shifting. In this situation, young people were mostly challenged by their parents' reactions to their new choices and desire to preserve the heritage of their ancestors. To their parents' dismay, the youth would attend a different church from their parents and were changing directions from their original traditions and beliefs.

### **Early Ministry**

Some 57,000 Tongans have emigrated to the United States over the years, many of them settling in the San Francisco bay area. In 1998, I also moved to the United States, to attend Asbury Theological Seminary for my first year of ministry. As the only Tongan student, I would visit my family in California every summer and school break. At first, I wasn't looking deeply into how the ministry's local (Kentucky) context compared to the Tongan Church, and what cultural differences there might be. When I got married in 2001, I transferred to Pacific School of Religion for my senior year. I was heavily focused on my studies and because I was paying for my own tuition, I was working full-time as well. In 2005, Bishop Charmian and her Cabinet appointed me to her local church, Hollister United Methodist, as a Youth Pastor.

I was excited to finally have a role in which I could reach the youth. My position for this local church started to open my eyes as to one of the main realities of most church concerns: young people were notably absent! Only five young people attended this local church where I was called to be a Youth Pastor. I compared the image of what I used to see at my church back home to what I saw at my first appointment as a Youth Pastor, and

was disappointed.

In light of this discovery, rather than looking after the church youth, my role as a youth Pastor shifted towards finding ways to attract younger people to church. This was a different approach than what was practiced by the ministry at Hollister UMC.

Nevertheless, I took on the task of seeking to unify old and young members and add to the youth participation in this church. I wanted to reproduce the unity between older and younger generations that I had so appreciated in my childhood. I had to understand where this lack of youth was coming from and find ways to ensure the continual attendance of younger audiences. This was frustrating work, since maintaining or encouraging church activities became a struggle. Most of the church members were around sixty years of age and had very little energy to do volunteer work. As a result, because my wife and I were significantly younger, we became the “hands and feet” for all church volunteer work.

The first challenge for me was relating to the Senior Pastor who controlled youth programs because I didn't know her intentions at the time. During the early stages of development, I attended church and observed church dynamic. I saw with my own eyes young people not really interested in a traditional church service. Other challenges came along. I was lacking in skills myself to be a youth Pastor. There was a gap between my knowledge from a person raised in America contrasted to my own experience of growing up back on the islands. For instance, some of the common stories of youth in the Hollister community about their daily lives went “over my head.” When any of them would discuss a topic of conversation, I found it difficult to relate. It forced me to take some time to find out the struggles of young people in church. I started to see a different point of view among young people in the church compared to what I grew up with.

After my second year serving in Hollister United Methodist Church, the bishop and his Cabinet appointed me to Red Bluff First United Methodist Church as a solo Pastor. I was so surprised that the church had only one youth member and they didn't have a Sunday school. Now as a first time solo pastor, these circumstances damaged my heart because I expected youth participation in the ministry to help run the church. Once again, this local church didn't look like a church at all. I am not talking about the building or appearance, but how the ministry managed church activity.

It was a difficult move for me because this church needed much in terms of general responsibilities but I made up my mind to focus on the children's ministry. I was very surprised on how the rest of the church positively responded to the children's ministry. A few of the parents were willing to support and participate in the children's ministry. After my first year in Red Bluff First United Methodist we had around thirty youth members and twenty attending Sunday school.

#### **Where I Am Now.**

After my first year at Red Bluff UMC, Bishop Brown and the Cabinet appointed me to Redwood City First United Methodist Church. This church had two language ministries which were Tongan and English. This was the first time I served in a Tongan language ministry and it evoked all of the memories about Tongan Churches back home. I was compelled to shape the Tongan ministry with what I was taught to follow and the traditional vision I had initially imagined.

What I noticed in the Tongan language ministry was that parents migrated from Tonga and their children were first generation Americans. The ministry was being jointly

run by the Tongan lay leader and the Pastor who was a non-Tongan speaker. I was the first Tongan appointed to this church to serve in both the English and Tongan language. My intentions for both ministries of the church were to first look at the church's assets. The church had a lovely building, close to the high school, and two minutes away from downtown. I also noticed that the church had Sunday school during the time of services.

When I went through the list of church members, something awakened in me when I discovered that youth church members numbered more than one-hundred. When I actually observed and counted for clarification, there were fewer young people than anticipated. The Sunday school attendance was also below average and I had to accept that the reality was different from what I pictured in my mind. I envisioned a Tongan church with passionate youth members strongly supporting and actively participating in the its affairs. This was my first Tongan church experience, painted for me a different way. However, I now consider parents whom migrated from Tonga to be what is called a “sandwich generation.” According to Pew Research Center this means, “those who have a living parent age 65 or older and are either raising a child under age 18 or supporting a grown child—are pulled in many directions.”<sup>3</sup>

After my first year, I continued to see that young people came to the church only for social activities and its frequent banquets. I started to research this situation and found that some children belonging to the church participated in Sunday school and their young parents preferred to stay home or do anything else besides attending service. I noticed the number of young members were dropping out of attendance and participation, not making church a priority.

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3. Kim Parker and Eileen Patten. “The Sandwich Generation: Rising Financial Burdens for Middle-Aged Americans.” Pew Research Center. 2013. web.



I compared the image of young people to how it was back home on the islands. In 2013, Bishop Brown and the Cabinet of California-Nevada Conference appointed me and my family to the First Tongan United Methodist of San Bruno. This church was the strongest Tongan church in all of America and had the highest number of Tongan-language speakers. I praised God for sending me to the right place and knew this church had primary resources to better the situation of the Tongan communities. I can see the hunger in young people at this church. Some of the young adults have already moved to other churches. Some have married those of other nationalities and have moved away from the church. As a result, I noticed that some of the older church members didn't worship together with their children and grandchildren. Some of the young people were falling into the gaps of cultural universality and in the process lost their church and family members.

The Tongan language-based church still faces the situation of not having new people join the church. Increasingly, young people with ties to the Tongan culture seem to move from other locations and join non-Tongan congregations for a variety of reasons. If the Tongan-American young adults lose interest in attending and perpetuating the Tongan church, what will happen to the future of Tongan language services? And what if they stop attending church altogether? How can we resolve this situation or re-make the Tongan Church in America so that the young people will find meaning and hospitality there, and take joy in being a part of a community that seeks to preserve their Christian heritage? This question is at the heart of this study, and the results of this project could guide a new beginning for the Tongan Church.

## Chapter 2

### The Context of the Project

Even as my journey in ministry began, I started building some groundwork for this project. I was the youngest Tongan ordained Pastor in our California Nevada conference. In every ministry to which I was appointed, I took it upon myself to make the youth and young adults, as well as the children ministry, my main priorities. My youthful age and level of energy made this initiative perfect to execute. This allowed me to view how I look and do things with the younger generation. This was the right place at the right time. Concern for young people and the passion to minister to them has framed my work in every subsequent ministry appointment.

### Call to Ministry

It started out with my calling to ministry back in 2005. At the time, I was assigned as Youth Pastor of the Hollister United Methodist Church. My duties were to preach and enlighten the youth and adolescents of Hollister UMC and feed them god's word. I then put together programs and activities for us all to participate in and become more involved with one another. I also served the Anglo Youth and collaborated with other Tongan Youth Churches such as Laurel United Methodist Church of Oakland. I took youth to the Bishop's Confirmation retreat, organized programs and mini retreats, where we would have sleepovers at the church and seek and define our faith. I then established a Youth Volunteer Mission Group. The purpose was to teach the youth the meaning of missionary

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work. We sent messages, announced them at church, put up flyers to provide some type of service, and pursued other engaging activities. We intentionally put our faith into action, whether it was yard work or household work. We never charged for what we did for others. Some recipients of our ministry would donate funds after our missionary work was done and all contributions went to the church. This ministry continuously became our duty and responsibility to our church and the community.

As my journey shifted directions, I was appointed to Read bluff UMC in 2008, where I continued to work with the younger generation. After a year, I got another calling to an actual Tongan Congregation, which I served Both the Tongan and English Services. I finally landed in a Tongan Congregation and that was the First United Methodist Church of Redwood City. My four years there taught me so much. I had the experience of working with both Tongan and English Services. I further discovered why I was so passionate to work alongside younger generations of this time. Here is when my vision for ministry became a reality. I started to see what God had instilled in me. I had a boost of motivation and it was this force that drove me to do more. I realized what I was capable of accomplishing for these children. This immediately made me assume the role of their support and served as a bridge to communicate and collaborate. I gratefully accepted that God had given me a strong and unwavering faith, assertiveness, personal energy and charisma, and the ability to connect to youth in sincere relationships. I decided with God's help to use these gifts. I organized a service for the young people of the church, where they could come and taste the variety of gifts and graces that God promised. My main focus was to teach the youth and young adults that our traditional

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services can be upgraded to more contemporary faith practices. We were searching for a way for our kid's to feel like they belonged in the Tongan Church.

In 2013 the United Methodist Church appointed me to one of the largest Tongan Congregations in our California Nevada Conference: San Bruno First Tongan United Methodist Church. I am currently serving this church. Once again, my experience affirmed the importance of the young people and youth of the church, and my calling to reach out to and enlist them in Christian service. Here is where all of my faith was put into work.

Observing my movements from place to place over the years, I realized that God had been preparing me for a special ministry to youth and had put me in a place where my expertise was needed. As I moved forward into the stomping grounds of San Bruno First Tongan United Methodist Church, I started to taste my reality. My first year there, I observed the youth and young adults of the community and decided how my expertise might come into play. There were many children and youth in this place, but I especially noticed the lack of attention towards the Tongan Youth by local churches.

I began to come up with many different ways to get our youth and young adults going. There was a huge fall back within the Tongan younger generations. They were not showing up or participating much. I came to understand that the reasons for this were many. First, the young people of the area were caught between the harsh expectations of their traditional elders and parents and the cultural narrative of their new American homeland. Among other things they were being raised among those with different music, means of communication, pace of life, peer group influences, and family values and structures. This contrasted sharply with the expectations of traditional Tongan culture,

embodied in the Tongan-American church. I finally stepped in and started to merge these two conflicting ways of my thinking about what young people need in their Christian formation. I found that they were more responsive to some traditional church activities that incorporated contemporary music, shared intergenerational leadership, real opportunities to serve others directly, and chances to question and perfect the faith and worship practices they had been taught. Again, my main focus was in the future of the church and building healthy relations between intergenerational church members.

Inside of me I've always had the desire to help our Tongan youth, especially positively influencing their mental and spiritual transitioning as they were migrating to America. I began to see that youth were suffering from the mass cultural destruction that plunging into a new culture exposed them to. As I sought to understand the mentalities of younger audiences I was reminded of the delicate nature of this issue.

As I started to work with the Tongan Youth in San Bruno, I first had to build their trust. As a Pastor, my priority was to be there and serve the young people. My heart broke after seeing young people absent every Sunday for church. I believed that the youth would be future church leaders and that they were a big part of the body of Christ.

My faith and my works were put to test. Young adults in San Bruno never showed up to any of the programs or activities let alone attend church on Sundays. Could it have been me because I was young and new? Was there an issue before I came? Or is it just the laziness of younger generations? But I moved from blaming myself or others and began to shift my focus into another direction. I came to know that in order to influence these young persons positively, one first needed to secure their trust. Getting to know them on a regular basis, doing activities with them outside of church, creating programs

for them every day of the week, and being there for them as a role model or father figure were effective in building trust. Young people of the community began to see me in multiple roles, not just as their pastor. Trust was a big issue and it took time to gain their comfort with me.

Searching and finding struggles of the younger generation can be challenging. Their mental picture of life is different from the land form which they come, especially when they are Tongan and growing up here in America. Trying to balance out the traditional teachings with more distinctively American life and ways is a constant battle. Different life styles are conveyed, distracting them from being called Tongan Americans. The language barrier is a struggle as well. Being Tongan didn't mean they spoke Tongan fluently. It was more of a choice than it was a priority for them. Struggles were everywhere in and out of church. I needed to make a place where they could come and feel like they were part of something: A place where they could come and not be judged.

My involvement with the young group of people began to have an impact on them. For the very first time in 2014, our yearly annual offering was the second largest amount of money to be raised in the history of San Bruno by our Youth, maxing a total of \$80,000. More kids were participating in the brass band during our traditional services. We started different ministries and permitted the youth to run them, allowing them to feel important and to be part of something. We influenced them to do missionary work and to be more active in our community. Finally, we opened up an opportunity to all young people and our community by starting an English service. By doing this, the Tongan youth started to feel open to the experience of church, and they were a valuable asset to the church. Going through hardship, they then started to know the meaning of

discipleship, leadership, and worship. They were able to relate their newly found confidence in faith with their call to be disciples of Jesus. More and more they sought to fulfill what Jesus called us to be and no longer be fishers of fishes but to be fishers of men for God's kingdom.

#### **Expansive History of First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno.**

First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno, California began with the dream of Tongan immigrants and their vision of what life could be there, in the land of the free. Back in 1974, a group of Tongan people, settlers in this country from Tonga who lived in San Bruno City, had attended a Tongan Service at the Hillsdale United Methodist Church. After the church, Mele Finau (the wife of Pastor Samipeni Finau) talked to a man name Kali Osai. The conversation was about starting a fellowship amongst people around the San Bruno area because the distance of traveling to Hillsdale United Methodist Church. They all had been to the English Service of San Bruno United Methodist church, but sought a Tongan Congregation to join. So they started a small group just like John Wesley started the Methodist movement. Under Mele of Finau and Kali Osai's leadership, on February of 1975, they started a small group at the residence and Kali Osai and he became the Lay Leader for the small group.

As Tongan families with a strong heritage, when they started to migrate, they were always looking for a community. It was a desire for a place to which they could belong to and call their own. There were many families from San Bruno, like those described above, who found that there was a Tongan language service in Hillsdale United

Methodist of San Mateo. They would travel every Sunday to join them. After the second year of commuting to Hillsdale United Methodist, They came up with an idea to establish a Tongan gathering with in their area. This way they wouldn't have to travel so far for church and their expenses wouldn't be so high. They believed that the Tongan gathering would be healthy for their spiritual life.

After a few gatherings and meetings, they then came up with the idea to start a Tongan language service in the facility of San Bruno United Methodist Church. In October of the same year, they gathered together in the church to open a Tongan language service. Rev Samipeni Finau was the pastor and they elected Kali Osai to be the Lay leader (Setuata) and also Kali Fanaika to be the treasurer. These individuals all belonged to the Methodist church back in the islands, which was called "Siasi Uesiliana Tau'ataina 'o Tonga." They connected with the Pastor of San Bruno United Methodist Church and asked him if they could use the building at 5p.m. on Sundays as a time for their Tongan Service. It was more comfortable for them to use a Methodist Church facility because they still believed they belonged to the Methodist denomination.

Starting out with just seven families, the door was wide open. The word then got around that there was a Tongan language speaking Service at the San Bruno Methodist Church. All of the Tongans in the San Bruno area started attending these services.

They used this place to preserve and explore their culture, tradition, and it was a place of fulfillment to what they had been missing in life due to being far away from their homeland. Many Tongans became permanent residents of America and created a similar community to that of their Tongan culture. They used the church space for different purposes. If any family, school or any groups who visited from Tonga arrived, they used



the church facility to help with their funding and anything that had to do with assistance and service.

In 1988-1999, Pastor Ana Tiueti Kalausa, the first woman to become a Pastor in California-Nevada Conference, became a second Pastor to this Tongan group. Rev Ana Tiueti Kalausa opened a new opportunity for ministry, as the first Tongan Pastor to take over after the Tongan Speaking ministry and Anglo congregation. After one year the Anglo congregation could not afford to continue on. They could not afford financially to run the church so the Conference decided to join New Vision United Methodist at Millbrae. The plan was to begin a transition between the Tongan membership and the Anglos who were ready to move to New Vision UMC. Rev. Halatoa Saulala was a clergy leader who helped to carry out plans that they had already set up for the moved to New Vision. They took with them the **personal** property of San Bruno UMC and a portion of the money from the Tongan group. The Tongan Language service took over the building with a new title: First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno. This ministry is growing stronger in the Tongan Language ministry. It is well known all over the San Francisco Bay Area as one of the strongest Tongan language speaking Churches in the California/Nevada Conference.

**Comment [B3]:** Do you mean personal property? I am not familiar with the term personate

In 2001-2011, under the leadership of Rev. Kalatini Ahio, the church became stronger financially and invested in a church home along with property additions. Rev. Kalatini served for ten years. The church started to get headstrong in the ministry and young people became more involved in Tongan worship and youth activities.

Rev. Maile Koloto was appointed to the church from 2011-2012. Most of the young people were getting married and starting families. Malie was leading young people

in traveling to training venues for the opportunity to reach out beyond the local church zone. They traveled to many different training programs, meetings, and workshops in a different variety of places. They started to diversify and do ministry outside of the local church. The church misunderstood the purpose of Rev Maile Koloto's leadership training. He struggled with members of the church, but was strong enough to uphold his beliefs. He developed a new way for young people and young couples to awaken their spiritual potential and partake in church activity.

Following Rev. Koloto I (the writer) was appointed to the First Tongan United Methodist of San Bruno in 2013 and have served it until now. To know that some of the Tongans who established the Tongan language ministry from the beginning are still alive today is astonishing. It has given me an opportunity to see the struggle between young Tongans who were born in United States as first generation Americans and their parents who migrated from Tonga. When I arrived the struggles were increasing because younger persons were feeling alienated from the church and because of their range of overall participation was narrow. As a pastor it was difficult to see the next generations of the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno facing such adversity. My concern was the possibility of spiritual alienation from God and the Christian tradition it could represent. We worried about the spiritual and social implications of a new generation where Christian identities and connections to Christian fellowship were losing traction.

#### **About the Tongan United Methodist Church Setting**

The church community in which I currently serve is mostly Tongan and very few are Samoan. The much older generations migrated from Tonga to United States. Their children are young adults today and are the first generation of Tongan-Americans. All of our Sunday schools are second generation Tonga-Americans. The members of First Tongan of San Bruno UMC are mostly professional caregivers, construction workers, and those employed with a company. The parents' level of education is mostly high school graduates from Tonga. The total membership of our church is four-hundred and forty-two including children. Two per cent are retirement age, twenty-five per cent are the parents. The Sunday school has ten per cent, the youth thirty-eight per cent, and young adults twenty-five per cent. We are increasing from last year with forty-four new members transferring from other denominations.

San Bruno is located between South San Francisco and Millbrae, adjacent to San Francisco International Airport and Golden Gate National Cemetery, and is approximately twelve miles (19 km) south of downtown San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> Our community is extended from the local city of San Bruno to the our distant neighbors: the city of Palo Alto, city of San Mateo, city of Hayward and city of Daly City. Traveling time to San Bruno is around twenty-five minutes to half an hour for our Church programs. Forty per cent of members commute from the city of Palo Alto: and, according to my last survey, ten per cent of the members who commute from Hayward City and who had moved out from San Bruno, still commute back and forth. San Bruno members are mostly connected to each other as extended family members. Somehow they link with each other from the unspoken Tongan connection. Church members will continue to commute to because of

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4. The City of San Bruno. Mapquest. Web.

the increasing cost of living and housing. However, the San Bruno's population is projected to increase by fifty per cent over the next 3 years according to parents. Each parent claims to have more than four children in each family. The fastest growing demographic are children who attend the church. They were the first generation to grow up in the church and start to marry outside their nationality. Their level of education is generally much higher than their parents.

**Comment [B4]:** Over how long in the future?

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to do a research-based analysis on the study of young people from my church. By doing careful research and reflecting on it, we intend to turn things around in hopes of making a difference in the ministry to young adults at the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno. We wish to do pro-active research. We want to transmute opposing attitudes towards young people of parents of the First Tongan United Methodist church of San Bruno and positively address the tension between the culture and the church. These tensions are influencing young people to not attend church. I would also examine how being a first generation Tongan-American impacts young people's views on church.

In this research, I will study carefully how the economy impacts the lives of young people who want to be involved in church activities and attend church every Sunday. This research will scrutinize how young people are supporting their local churches with their tithes and offerings.

I also need to research how cultural narratives impact the interest of young people in attending church. This is especially true when both parents and children are living in a new land with a new culture. Our hope is to awaken church members, elders and parents to see that young people can't afford for us to assume that we seek necessary solutions but effectively exclude the best ones. Furthermore, we want to change the way we do ministry so we can engage young minds and keep them coming back.

Finally, we would like to offer a solution for restoring participation of young people in the church and allow church leaders to hear feedback from young people and parents in the church. It is our hope that this research will shape the way church members and young people of the church think and operate as they share a faith community. We envision re-engaging with young adults and developing realistic programs for their participation in the church. Also, for those who are concerned about the future of the church, we anticipate that this project will give peace of mind for many spectators.

The scope of this project has been delimited, reaching young persons between the ages of 18-25 in the area surrounding The First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno, California. Study of this setting showed that two- hundred young people, male and female, identify as living within the parish boundaries. I included in my research field some young people from other Tongan churches so I can compare and contrast answers from a wide radius of test sites.

Two focus groups of approximately twelve members each will were formed, and led by two trained facilitators. From the findings of the focus groups, a survey was constructed. In order to reach a wider sample group, an advisory team was set up,

consisting of six committed members of the congregation, who assisted in administering the survey.

This group received training and orientation to the survey. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions.

LAC members or those trained by facilitators were asked to interview young adults from the wider Tongan community, identifying interviewees from work, friendships and other relationships.

The data were then be analyzed and form the basis for this thesis. In addition to the focus groups, plus the survey and its analysis, an attempt was made to look at the global and historical context for the diminishing numbers we are observing. Whatever the case, our firm intention was to find answers to the question, “What must the Church do to address the situation of dwindling young adult participation in its ministries?”

### CHAPTER 3

#### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theological foundation for this project is contextual. That is to say that I look to my history, culture, and customs to illustrate the light of the Good News, “what God is like and doing to us in his saving acts of revelation and salvation”.<sup>5</sup>

There are elements in the theology put forward here which are regional; but the theology is also universal. Christ was born a Jew, and He grew up in a Hebrew context. He illustrated in his parables many things which were regional and limited to his culture and environment. And yet the meaning of his teaching and its theological interpretation were universal.

Jesus taught and illustrated that the Kingdom of Heaven is like mustard seeds. He knew about the animals of Palestine such as the sheep and the goats. He talked about the vineyards, farmers, and the housewives who hid leaven in the dough when making bread. He knew his Jewish history of liberation. He detected places where shoals of fish would come to find their food. He used metaphors like the good shepherd, and the secrets of life; and he even talked the best kind of yoke that farmers should use for ploughing. He used his environment to contextualize “the ecumenicity and catholicity of theology”.<sup>6</sup> He loved and appreciated his Hebrew world as it was meant to be: suitable for the existence of total man in right relationship with his God: - not a Jewish (regional) God, but the one God (universal).

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<sup>5</sup> Havea, Sione Amanaki. “Christianity in the Pacific Context”. *Coconut Theology* (1986) 14.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, Sermon 187

### **Biblical Rationale for Coconut Theology**

If Jesus had grown up in Tongan context, He would have related his teaching to what we have in Tonga; the coconut, yams, and Taro. These are utilized even in celebrating weddings, and at the time of death in a Tongan context.

It's impressive to know that Jesus is with us and has the availability to meet our needs. (John 6:36) In this passage Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty".<sup>7</sup> Relating this to the context in Tonga, everyone knows and literally lives in coconut. It is a tree of many uses, and it's a tree of life for all who live in Tonga. Jesus could have added another identification of himself – "I am the Coconut of life, whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"<sup>8</sup>.

The coconut tree itself has many uses, such as a drink, food, housing, shelter, fuel, mats, fishing gear, washing soap, and beautification, etc. Once it bears fruit it continues to bear fruit every year without ceasing. The fruit is round and it has a tendency to roll down to the lowest possible level. The coconut rolls down with its many life-giving possibilities. It rolls down with food, drink, husks, shells, money and industries. It has a protective shell and soft kernel. It has eyes, a mouth and features like those of a human head. When one drinks from it one draws nourishment by kissing it.

The coconut then rolls to the lowest point on earth. In the same way, Jesus was born in humility which marks the understanding of Christ of the Exchange. By this we mean that Christ in His life, suffering, death, and resurrection met all of our human

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<sup>7</sup> John. 6:36 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Havea, Sione Amanaki. "Christianity in the Pacific Context." *Coconut Theology* (1986) 14.



needs. Before God the Creator He humbled Himself and became one of us, and took on His shoulders the burden of human sin. By our identification with Him in His incarnation we can live as though we were witnesses to His life and work, even though we were not there. It is that profound. As Augustine puts it,

He by whom all things were made was made one of all things. The Son of God by the Father without a mother became the Son of man by a mother without a father... The maker of the sun was made under the sun. He who fills the world lay in a manger, great in the form of God but tiny in the form of a servant; this was in such a way that neither was His greatness diminished by His tininess, nor was His tininess overcome. The greatest of all heaven and above, become like us, human, and came with all the greatness of eternity, to be with us and walk with us and live among us. And we become his own.<sup>9</sup>

The metaphor of the coconut in Tongan culture suggests another biblical concept, the fullness of time (Kairos). No one can push back the time when the coconut will ripen, nor make it ripen any earlier; only in the fullness of time will it fall.

Under the prodding of the American notion of time (chronos), most of us become concerned about time and control time of life. But in Tonga we used to call our time the Tongan Time. I think the best suggestion for naming the time Tongan time is to call it Coconut Time. But I think no matter whether one is early or late is beside the point. The important thing is that the task is done and the mission fulfilled on its own timing according to the Creator (Kairos).<sup>10</sup>

A full Christology can be seen in the coconut. The Incarnation and the Virgin Birth is in the coconut. The full potential of new life is in the coconut and when it is ready (fullness) the new life breaks through in sprouts and, rooted in the soil, it grows

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Havea, Sione Amanaki. "Christianity in the Pacific Context." *Coconut Theology* (1986) 14.

towards heaven. There are glimpses of death and resurrection: “a seed must die in order to live” John 12:24. At the end, the authorities forced Christ to the earth’s womb, intending to keep Him there with the Roman seal (power), and to say the end had come. But instead of the end they had expected, the shell cracked and resurrection took place. A new full-grown coconut came to its own.

When we think about of the Eucharist, the coconut is more relevant to islanders than bread and the wine. Societies from Tonga to the Philippines all have validated the importance of the coconut in communal ceremonies.<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes the coconut falls into the ocean and it floats to another island to take food and other possibilities for life to the people out there. In this project, it is my joy to explore how the coconut fruit (Tongan perspective on Christian faith) has journeyed across the ocean of the Pacific for thousands of miles, and how amazingly the coconut finally landed in a new Land, called the United States of America. In my view the ocean has not been a barrier, but rather has unified the cultures in faith in the Tongan-American church.

### **Mission: Taste and See**

The Scriptures carry this idea of sending out and reconciling across distances with the notion of Christians becoming ambassadors for Christ. . Paul said, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”<sup>12</sup> The Apostle Paul, spoke of the purpose

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<sup>11</sup> Reta Hetleman Finger. *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007. 48.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV)

of God's mission, which was to send Jesus Christ to this world and through Him and reconcile all creatures with God. Paul was concerned about how the world in his time would know about how Jesus Christ was nailed on the cross, buried, and after three days rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. How, he seemed to speculate, can the world can prove and believe this story is true in a visible world? The answer seems to have come from the first Christian community. Acts declares, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>13</sup> We are Christ's ambassadors. God makes his appeal through Jesus Christ who lives in us. In Galatians Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."<sup>14</sup>

### **Coconut Theology in a New Land**

When a Tongan migrates to United State of America, their first priority is to look for a church at which to worship on Sunday. The main local churches in Tonga are the United Methodist Church and Roman Catholic Church. Of course there are and other churches.

As I recall growing up in Tonga, everybody belonged to a church. Most of the Tongans moving to America belonged to the Uesiliana Tau'ataina 'o Tonga. Or, as it translates in English, the United Methodist Church. Thus, as soon as they arrived at any place in the United States, they looked to find a United Methodist local church in their

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 1:8 (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

area. I assume that Christians who emigrated to the U.S. from other Tongan churches did the same. The Tongans who have moved to United States of America have considered it a New Land, full of opportunity. They have been motivated by the dream of living in this land of opportunity and having successful and prosperous lives in the U.S..

In the style of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I would cast the Tongan Dream in this way:

I have a dream.

I have a dream, that one day, we will voyage across the Pacific Ocean to find a new land.

I have a dream, that one day, the coconut will struggle through the Ocean of waves, and its journey will end.

I have a dream, that one day the coconut tree will grow up in a new, wider space with many opportunities.

I have a dream, that new lands of opportunity will sustain the coconut fruit so that it will grow to bear more fruit.

I have a dream, that young and new coconut trees will have a new culture, breathe the air, and taste the foods of a new land.

I have a dream, that one day, the young coconut trees will compose a new song, sing many new songs, enjoy an education, lead us a new way of life.

This is our hope, this is the faith that the new coconut trees will grow up taller and stronger as who we are in the new land.

As to the Israelites of old, You promise me this new Land will be a Land of opportunities, a land of honey and sweets.

Faith will lead us to a new direction, a new culture, a new song, a new life in a new land.

One day you will sing with me in my own songs, play with me my own instruments, speak with me in my new language, so that I may taste Your knowledge and wisdom.

You bring me to this new land, Lord. I will trust you to strengthen me. You have promised. "I will be with you always." Your glory will be revealed as we see our beloved community as an image of heaven.

I have a dream that our new Land will be new Jerusalem, all our labor will come to harvest there.

Some places in the New Land seem less hospitable to Tongans who move to the U.S. than others, though. In order for a coconut tree to produce very well, there's certain areas in America where it can be planted and grow fully. The state of Hawaii, or perhaps Florida might be more promising areas where it would grow healthy because it's tropical and humid. These places allow the coconut tree to produce its fine texture and sweet juice, to maximize its potential. But in some places in America, The Tree can't grow or bear fruit. It can only be bought at the store, or bought in a can. It does not come freshly as it is in certain regions. In some places, the elements of the coconut are only to be used by themselves. For example, some will use the shell only for decorations or the core of the meat for food, and the juice to make coconut oil. This refers to when a Tongan, being the Coconut, moves to the new land which is America. This person may find the atmosphere hostile, unwelcoming, or prejudiced. Because of language difficulties, educational limitations, and pronounced cultural differences, this person's capabilities and positive character may be hidden behind fear and hesitation, and may not be evident. Opportunities to utilize her/his full potential will not be available. But when there is a welcome that includes friendship, support, job training, and social services, the new immigrant can thrive, and all the elements of the coconut will be used.

### **The Practice of Theology as Love in Action**

When Tongan Christians move to the new land, the main struggle between the parents and the young generation is that the parents come from the islands with their own

order of worship or whatever customs of church life they were used to back in the Islands. They tend to stick to their traditional attire, language, and settings, and all too often are closed to learning new ways to be in community. On the other hand, the younger generations, having mostly grown up in the American culture, have English as a first language and prefer their own way of dressing, and ordering of worship. Going back to when the coconut moves to the new land, not all of the elements will be used. What the Tongans are used to back in the islands, may not be useful in the new land. This fact may be hard to accept among first generation Tongans, who have been held together by, and take pride in, their culture of origin. However, in God's time perhaps they might take joy and comfort in the fact that one or so elements of their character, culture, or customs might be highly useful to the work of the church and the propagation of the Christian faith. Whether it's the coconut juice or the coconut shell that will be used, but not necessarily the whole coconut, the important thing is to offer to God the gifts and capabilities they have and trust that God will use them. This witness of humility will not be lost on the young adults we studied. As new coconut trees, they will feel supported and nourished by an older generation that has not valued them enough. They are the future of both the Tongan culture and the Tongan church.

These young adults of San Bruno First Tongan United Methodist church make the heart of worship of God their first priority. In that sense they have outgrown their parents in faith. As far as the generation of the parents, they're trying to save and make sure that their children preserve the culture and tradition of Tonga and are not prioritizing their worship of God. This is the struggle now, here in the new Tongan homeland.

Furthermore, the scriptures prescribe what kind of worshippers the Creator is looking for in the current and future Tongan-American church. A passage that helps establish a theological foundation for this project is John 4:23. It's a conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the Jacob well. The Bible declares, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks."<sup>15</sup>

This scripture indicates that no matter wherever we may move to, or what is our identification, what kind of culture and tradition we represent, or what means we employ in our worship, God is looking at us as a true worshipper who, as the scriptures have said, in Romans 12:1, is willing to "...offer our body as a living sacrifice to God."

### **Theology as the Celebration of Belonging**

In the John 4:23 conversation, the woman was discussing places of worship with Jesus, saying that the Jews worshipped at Jerusalem, while the Samaritans worshipped at Mount Gerizim. Jesus had just revealed that He knew about her many husbands, as well as the fact that the current man she lived with was not her husband. This made her uncomfortable, so she attempted to divert his attention from her personal life to the matters of religion. Jesus refused to be distracted from His lesson on true worship and got to the heart of the matter: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him"<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> John 4:23- (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> John 4:23 (NIV)

The overall lesson about worshipping the Lord in spirit and truth is that worship of God is not to be confined to a single geographical location or necessarily regulated by the temporary provisions of the Old Testament law. With the coming of Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the centrality of the temple in worship. With the coming of Christ, all of God's children gained equal access to God through Him. Worship became a matter of the heart, not external actions, and directed by truth rather than ceremony. It became a celebration of belonging.

Here the scripture cited calls forth a basic dilemma our church faces: how can First Tongan UMC of San Bruno seek to preserve the Tongan culture and tradition in ways that do not exclude the desired worship practices of Young Adult Tongans? What does worshipping God in Spirit and truth look like in our church right now? What should it look like? Right now it appears that our first generation members see the church primarily as a place to worship God, but even more so a place to enjoy the island life of the Tongan community within the culture and tradition. The young people of the church of San Bruno struggle, to have a space to explore their own new ways of their own American culture

As the poem cited above indicates to us, this new land will be a land of opportunity. It is imperative that we let the young little coconut tree sing a new song, play their new instruments, let the young adult and youth worship the living God in Spirit and truth

Another scripture passage powerfully indicates to us the struggle described above. Mark 2:22states, "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the



wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”<sup>17</sup>

The generational struggles of the immigrant church present a constant theme, which is letting the old fade and die so that the new can take hold. “Cars have a life expectancy. Most 1964 Mercury Comets have long been doomed to the junkyard. Engines die, carburetors rust and models go out of style, so we trade them in for newer vehicles. In our fast-paced world, Apple debuts a new iPhone every few years and the most popular apps have almost monthly updates. We’ve come to expect frequent upgrades.”<sup>18</sup>

Accepting this possibility of rapid change for the style and customs of a local church is a hard sell. For, a Tongan parent generation who is strong willed and very dedicated to involvement in ministry tends to think the church needs no remodeling or renovation. We expect congregations, including their children, to hum along for years and years, thinking our young Tongans will want to pile into our 1964 yellow Mercury Comet and enjoy the retro ride. But that is a faulty assumption.

While the message of the gospel itself is both timeless and flawless, the packaging we wrap it in must adapt with the times or we will quickly lose relevance. Pipe organs, steeples and choir robes were never wrong, but they won’t help us reach today’s generation. Nor do stale religious systems, tired terminology, or worn-out denominational programs that should have been mothballed long ago.

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<sup>17</sup> Mark 2:22 (NIV)

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, Andrew C. *Generation Rising* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 133.

Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples that people don't put new wine in old wineskins because the skins will burst and the wine will be wasted. "Put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved," Jesus said (Matt. 9:17, NASB). But many churches and ministries today insist on pouring their new wine in the old models, again and again. We resist innovation and we fight progress.

### **The Body of Christ: Youth as the Future of the Church**

The youth of our church are its future. It is they who will become the Body of Christ anew in our context. But I am willing to say that ninety- percent of what Tongans are doing in church today needs a total makeover. We are facing the most daunting renovation project in the history of the church. But the task is not impossible. It will require us to take these painful steps:

1. We must break free from the fear of change. God is always on the move. He might lead us to camp in one spot for a while, but we can never get too comfortable in one place. His trumpet will eventually blow and the cloud of His presence will shift. Don't park when God is calling you forward. Stay open to His fresh directives, and expect Him to stretch your faith. He is adventurous!

2. We must be willing to defy tradition. People who are married to the past cannot embrace the future. Sacred cows do not belong in the pulpit; they must be sacrificed on the altar. "The way we've always done it" will not work in God's new season. The crowd chooses the comfortable pews of nostalgia, but God is with the courageous few who are willing to blaze a new path into unreached territory.

3. We must ask the Spirit to reveal new strategies. We cannot rely on church growth gurus, popular books or rock-star preachers to lead us into genuine change. Copying spiritual trends is just a form of carnality—and it is a sad substitute for real innovation. If the work of transforming the church is not totally led by the Holy Spirit, then our changes will be shallow and our impact will be pitiful. The last thing we need is a superficial upgrade.

I believe God wants to unleash a gushing river of new wine into the Tongan church today, but He is directing us to prepare our wineskins. What is old must be renewed by the Spirit, what is outdated must be remodeled, and what is ineffective must be replaced. God wants to do a new thing. Don't resist it.

I, myself, am a Tongan who has immigrated to the U.S. In that sense I am of the first generation parents whose eyes need to have opened. We are like the coconut tree, whose fruit has drifted across the seas and planted itself on American soil. We still bring the mentality of how we worshipped back in Tonga and apply it in this different land, and different setting. However, using Jesus' image of the wineskin, if we are to capture and enjoy the new wine produced from the church in a new land, we need new wineskins. Our old wineskins are worn out and leaky. They will eventually burst if we try to put new wine in them. Instead, we need to sew together sound new wineskins that can stretch and hold the new wine and preserve it for good use in the church..

This is good news for all the Tongans who moved from Tonga to America, because it calls upon us to identify again with the Incarnation as the humiliation of God that Apostle Paul speaks of in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians. He is exhorting those whom he is writing to humility, saying, "Let this mind be in you, which

was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, became obedient unto death, even to the death on the Cross."<sup>19</sup>

Jesus set an example for us human flesh with his humility and humbleness, as he empties out himself. When we are brought to the new land as immigrant people, our surroundings and settings will be different. We need to humble ourselves just as God sent his one and only son to be low himself in importance for the sake of his people. When we struggle out here in the new land as a coconut tree, we need to have the mind of Christ and empty out our pride and try to humble ourselves as we try and adapt our lives to the new. The culture that the Tongans brought with them needs to be poured out with a meek flow so that we are like Jesus. As we move from Tonga to here, the struggle is real. If we humble ourselves and let go of the traditions that we were used to back in the islands and just have a mind of Christ and not a human mind, then his grace will save and renew us. We need to empty out our pride and strengthen our human humility so that we have the mind of Christ. I believe that this partnership between those of us who are faithful in this way, and God, will save our children.

We are not naturally humble, and the primary grace we need to even become humble, let alone grow in humility, is grace in the mind. We must see more clearly and more deeply what we already believe, that the whole point if the Incarnation was that God humiliated himself to teach us, so that like him we too might be humble.

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<sup>19</sup> Philippians 2:5-11

## Chapter 4

### PROJECT PREPARATIONS, METHODOLOGY, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Prior to starting this project, much thorough planning and consideration went into the preparation of the core of this venture. As The Lay Advisory and the researcher met, ideas started to flow and come to mind, mental notes were made, and written reflections were done. One of these reflections was discerning the ages of our membership and how the church perceives age when we have the Tongan service every Sunday. They discovered that between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, church members have the lowest count of attendance for Sunday services. Their parents on the other hand, are the strong support system of the church, even though their children are not highly active in any of the church's activities. It is telling that, when parents were assigned to ask their children to attend church via personal invitation of the congregation, very few accepted the offer. The future of the First Tongan Church of San Bruno without children could result in a quick ending for its continual operation. I am concerned about what will happen in the future. Who will continually attend Tongan Churches in America?

I am fortunate that I continue to find a way to meet with young people of Tongan descent in my area. Out of the study involved in this project the idea has been set to start a member revival as the youth and young adult project in our church as a mission. I began by changing the leadership. When I looked at the vision of the church and the importance of the young people to its future, I saw a grave absence of young leaders. So I brought this to the attention of the Nominating Committee. The response was, "The

pastor is always a chair of this committee.”<sup>20</sup> I am more than willing to take up the task. The pastor in our denomination helps this committee to elect the right person to the right position in the church according to their gifts and graces. When I witness the loss of young people from the local church I feel troubled and sad. I want to ask every Tongan Church, including First Tongan Church of San Bruno, to imagine the positive impact from the presence of Tongan youths. If our vision for the church’s ministry excludes them, then something is very wrong.

The first step was to have a conversation with the chair of the Council Committee. He is the one who can see the vision for the church most clearly and find a way to impel it. I explained the idea to him and he became part of the Doctor of Ministry Project. We discussed how this project could potentially enlarge the works of the church ministries. The matter of respecting and including young people has been a struggle with the church for a long time but no one was willing to take a closer look at it or diffuse the issue.

After talking to the chair of the Council Committee, a request was made to temporarily relieve the pastor of his personal church obligations in order to carry out the project efficiently and effectively. Discussions about the project between the men’s group shaped the minds of church members on the importance of young people attending service. Parents were asked to join and implement the concern within the church. In this project, parents were strongly encouraged in helping their own children to restore their interest in the church. Announcements to the entire church about the project were made. Although many ignored the message, it was clear to see keen interest in faces in the

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<sup>20</sup> *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, Method of Organizing a New Church. 201, Paragraph 258.1c

audience. Church members must have the resilience to keep trying and compassion for young people if we plan on the survival of Tongan churches in the U.S.

### **Defining the Universe for Study**

An important task for the Lay Advisory Committee and the student was to locate a target group and define it as a universe for study. The group selected was the age group of twenty-one and older young adults who are in the parish area of First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno. This targeted young adults who still are members of the church, but hardly attend any of the church services, activities, or functions. The data produced by this study will, hopefully, also open up research on other Tongan churches in California for correlations and discussion.

Our concern presents a challenge for most of the Tongan churches in United States, but particularly for members of our local church. In fact, it is a storm that's between parents and their children. As many migrated from Tonga to America fifty years ago, very few of them were able to anticipate the soon- to- be future of our Tongan church community.

This project studied the contextual and cultural impact on the youth of Tonga as they immigrated with their families to the U.S. Tonga was originally called “the Friendly Island,” but one might well say today that the experience for youth has been far from friendly. Generational cultural clashes are manifest in immigrant families and have played a negative role in local churches. One of the challenges faced in this study was the lost interest and participation of young people in Tongan language services. The Tongan

church in America and will continually have issues with this, especially First Tongan United Methodist church of San Bruno.

### **Recruiting and Training Focus Group Leaders**

It was a challenge to choose the right person for a leader of the focus group. As a Tongan church speaking Tongan, language is a barrier to process this project because many of the Tongan church members use English as their secondary language. Capability isn't enough to equip leaders to connect with and lead a focus group from a different generation and context.

One of my best friends, Mark Squire, had the knowledge and understanding of the requirements for this project. A lay speaker from First Tongan United Methodist of San Bruno named Mele Finau assisted with the focus groups as well.

Mark and Mele were willing to be trained, and most of the time were willing to assist with their quality time. They understood both the context of Tongan and American cultures. They have gifts and the grace to be a leader of each focus group. They have a passion to discover the answers and the results that will come from these interviews. This partnership embodies diversity in that it embraces leadership from both female and male perspectives I believe this diversity allowed young participants to experience comfort with these leaders and encouraged them to share their voices and opinions..

Equipping Mele and Mark to know how and where the proper time to ask questions was carried out. They understood the significance of helping the group feel



comfortable with each other and also with answering the questions. Mele and Mark led and helped the focus group to dig deep behind the reasoning and meaning of the answers.

Mele and Mark were trained to lead the focus group during their own times of convenience. They reviewed the skills involved in facilitating successful focus groups, such as putting people at ease, providing a safe, private, and comfortable space, and framing and asking questions carefully. They followed this with using a comfortable room of the church, placing questions on power point presentations, and recording the sessions with participants' permission.

### **Recruiting Focus Group Participants.**

Members of two different small groups (between ten to eleven people) from the San Bruno UMC and from other Tongan congregations were able to serve the focus groups. These members were chosen based on prior knowledge of young adult interests and abilities, to effectively interact with and communicate with young adults between ages twenty-one and thirty-five years of age. The selection of these leaders was intentional and careful. The Lay Advisory group chose key members who could be key people to influence other parents and young people. The LAC also chose members who were active in the church and could communicate with me and the young people in the English language. These were people who were willing to listen to the young people's voices, those who could open minds, hearts and not cast judgment. The LAC also chose members with children who personally struggle with the project's issue. Amongst them were members whom the LAC considered to be dependable based on prior experiences.

And, of course, they chose those most likely to articulate their faith sincerely, those perceived to have a good relationship with Christ and heart for the young people.

Finally, LAC selected 20 additional members based on the criteria for professional project guide lines for the Doctor of Ministry program.

### **Focus Group Process- What Happened in the Groups, Data**

Before meeting up with the focus group, a contractual agreement, Consent to Participate in a Research Study, was signed by all participants.

### **FOCUS GROUPS**

Participants of the two focus groups.

I had a total of 20 people in these focus groups consisting of a fine balance of male and female participants. They were divided into two separate focus groups. The names of participants remain undisclosed.

#### The first focus group meeting

Twenty people signed the agreement to become a participant in the focus group. July 10, 2014 was set up date for the first meeting, and used an educational room at the church for a comfortable place for the small group. Mark led that meeting with eighteen questions. The group was greeted, and was followed with a word of prayer and Mark explained the purpose of the meeting and what was the expectation of the meeting. Mele Finau was the person trained to support the first group with recording the conversations.

**Comment [B5]:** Tevita- do not list the persons by name here unless you have their permission.

Mark started the meeting by presenting the first question. The question was present on the projector and the group answered the question in rotation depending on who was sitting next to previous speaker. This group was a balanced mix of ages and genders.

#### The second focus group meeting

The second focus group meeting, Mele Finau led the group and presented eighteen questions in all. Mark was supporting and helping to tape record the conversation of the second group. They started with an opening prayer, introductions and explaining the purpose and expectation of the meeting. One thing that stuck out was the need to avoid repeating the answers previously mentioned by group members.

The challenge with the second group was that most participants were females. This project attracted a lot more women. They were willing to attend and make themselves available for this particular meeting time. Another challenge was the language barrier. The women felt more comfortable with this meeting in English. Maybe next a meeting in the Tongan language should be done along with a translator present.

#### **Advisory Team Construction of the Questionnaire**

The LAC's first meeting took place at one of the church offices. It was the intentional meeting place. It established a feeling and an atmosphere to help the committee members to think of the project not as an academic school but a reality and new movement to revive the church. It could help members feel the importance of the

church and how they are getting together. Determining the range of individual age groups was attempted .

The Lay Advisory Committee was tasked with the construction of the questionnaire in collaboration with the researcher/candidate. Questions sorted out and formed from the focus group responses were the skeleton of the questionnaire, but were suggestive enough to generate many more questions. The LAC worked with the researcher/candidate to determine the range of ages of the participants, and developed relevant questions designed to evoke authentic answers.

### **Recruiting and Preparing the Administrators of the Questionnaire.**

The kind of people willing to help had necessary personal assets to carry out the questionnaires for my target group. Choosing people who would administer the questionnaire by their qualifications, character, and skill was the most effective method for recruiting them. They were seen by the rest of the congregation as trustworthy young adults from our youth and young adult ministry.

The importance of technology to work properly and connect to my target group was significant. The skillful use of this technology allowed young adults to make time to respond and encourage their willingness to carry out these questionnaires and meet with my target group even if it wasn't in person.

Tu'ipulotu Tongilava was one of our young adults who manages our youth website for the church. She sent out questionnaires to young people over the Internet.

This enabled her to follow up with our youth to make sure they filled them out and submit them on time.

Toa 'Ulu'ave organized the physical setting and met with the young adults to fill out the questionnaires on hard copies. Their youth director was asked if she had time to help with the questionnaires. She was also willing to help with reaching our youth to fill out the questionnaires as well.

Another recruiter was a Pastor in a Tongan church. His local church has young adult members high on the maturity scale; they also have high moral and spiritual quantities. He somewhat accomplished what we're trying to do with our San Bruno young adults and gave us valuable feedback that was instrumental during our process.

At the first meeting with administrators of the questionnaires we covenanted with each other to abide by these rules:

- Rule # 1: We are instrument for God's kingdom and God called us.
- Rule # 2: The conversation of the interview will confidential.
- Rule # 3: We create a good place for the target group to be comfortable and answer honestly.
- Rule # 4: Respect each other's answers, suggestions, developing ideas, avoid defensiveness.
- Rule # 5: Listening, leading and directing the target group in answering the questions, not answering the question for them.
- Rule # 6: Contextualize the question for the target group's understanding.
- Rule # 7: There are no answers that are right and wrong or stupid but all answers will benefit the ministries of any Local Tongan Church.
- Rule # 8: Need to be on time and flexible for anytime requested by the interviewer.

After discussing and agreeing upon the group's rules, we went over the importance of the due dates to receive all of the questionnaires. I explained to

them the importance of collecting all of the data as an important contribution to the church of San Bruno ministry.

After explaining the intention to the 3 groups, each member received a copy of the questionnaire so that they could have a clear understanding of what to expect from the target group. We went over all of the questions together. The importance of their positions as church leaders was discussed because of the urgency of this ministry to help the target group and our church.

### **Preparing for and Conducting the Interviews**

#### **PREPARATION:**

Our administrative volunteers came for a second meeting before conducting their interviews. We started with an opening prayer.

Also following a brief training session, we developed a list of safety measures that we would use during distribution of the surveys:

#### Safety and Protection.

1. Toa must have an assistant (when meeting to fill out the questionnaires).
2. Toa and her assistant will organize a time to come by homes of target individuals.
3. Visiting to homes will not be earlier than 8 a.m. or beyond 6 p.m.
4. Must dress appropriate for the meeting time.
5. Each questionnaire will explain the purpose of this project.
6. Target groups will fill out questionnaires to the best of their knowledge.
7. Interviewers will explain or re-phrase the question but not answer the question.

8. Meeting space will be a safe and comfortable setting.
9. The members will report each week on the progress of each interview.
10. Each meeting at the church provides coffee and cookies.

#### Emergency Plan

Members who will travel for interviews must assure that there is good weather conditions for driving, vehicles are registered with the DMV, they're in good health, not overwhelmed with meetings or other obligations, and are expected to submit a weekly progress report on how meetings went. These general rules permit members who staff the project to be on the same page and revise strategies if needed.

Toa was then invited to come and make her presentation on how she planned to contact the target group for their meeting in person. She had set up a meeting time with a different group and other people as well and arranged individual interviews with them. The target group is most of our church's young people. Toa set up meetings with them for after Sunday services at their convenience. It was hoped that whoever made it to the church service would attend the group meeting afterward to fill out the questionnaires. This effort was led by Toa and her assistant.

Another method to reach young adults with the questionnaires was to arrange a time to visit those who agreed to fill out the questionnaires at their homes. Some young people indicated that they did not desire to make this project a priority for their time, or they didn't take this project as a primary priority for their time. She made a list of their names to which helped her to meet with as many of these who had agreed to meet with her.

Tuipulotu employed yet another creative way to reach young adults. She used emails for those of our youth willing to do the questionnaire by email. She used a church member's contact list to get the young people's contact information. She also used Face Book to contact them and to see if they were willing to fill out the questionnaires. She contacted them by phone and one of the main conversations was to ask for their emails so they could send the questionnaires to her. She made a list of those who had already received the questionnaire so that she could follow up with them.

### **Determining the Distribution of the Questionnaires**

Distribution of the questionnaires started on February 1<sup>st</sup>. They were to be returned by April 30, 2015. My personal home address was listed on the questionnaire. The target group was asked not to sign the questionnaires and/or write their names on the copies or give any other personal information. These questionnaires were handled as confidential.

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed throughout this duration. Because the project could potentially benefit other Tongan churches, 30 copies were given to a previous Church to which the candidate/researcher had been employed.

Fortunately, twenty copies were distributed during our Annual Conference of California/ Nevada. Young Tongan people who represented their local churches were very excited and willing to participate in this project by answering the questionnaires. The interviewers found that filling out the questionnaires took 1 hour-1 ½ hours.



**Collating and Formatting the Data.**

Every week some of the questionnaires were forwarded to my home address and every Sunday, meetings were held to fill out questionnaires. Leaders reviewed Toa's lists of the young participants to make sure that we didn't miss anyone and forwarded to me the questionnaires that followed this clarification. The digital coordinator (Facebook, the web etc.) organized the questionnaires according to the list of who filled them out, received the questionnaire, or currently were awaiting response for follow up. All of this information was forwarded to my personal email. After examining the data for accuracy, the questionnaires were printed out in hard copies.

After collecting all of the completed questionnaires from target groups, we took a one week break to "refresh" ourselves. After this break a brief meeting was held in my office to discuss how and when the remaining work should be carried out. The meeting was started with a word of prayer which "broke the ice" by sharing how God works in each member's life. A particular date to meet was set up to format the questionnaires according to designated categories: we agreed upon Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup> before Mother's day.

The recruiting Administrators of the questionnaires met to summarize and format the information before the upcoming holiday. The setting was our social hall because the church was still under construction and we needed a comfortable and spacious place to concentrate.

It is important to note the spiritual dynamics of this meeting: before dividing in three different groups, we offered a word of prayer and gave thanks to God for his

blessings and strength. We were all reminded of our mission and purpose for this meeting. We split all members into groups of three and counted all of the completed questionnaires and divided them among each group to read and discuss the results among themselves.

A framework for sorting out the complex data from the questionnaires was devised. Those handling the data were asked to be guided by the following:

Summarizing and Classifying the Data into Eleven Categories:

1. How many questionnaires were returned?
2. Respondent's ages and gender?
3. Respondents' place of interview?
4. Respondents' affiliation?
5. The team you worked with?
6. Tally all responses to questions ratio on all questionnaires received?
7. Summarize any responses in a few paragraphs
8. Look over all results and state any conclusions as to why these young people don't come to church, and are turned off to church, unhappy with church etc. What needs to change in the church according to their responses?
  - a. Youth seek interest in the church
  - b. Giving youth a say (involvement) in planning and conducting worship and programs.
9. Summarize your thoughts, and add a summary of things they like or which hold promise for them in the church.
  - a. Planned Tongan cultural activities
  - b. Bible to use as guide for their life
10. Create spiritual groups for youth to interact with Bible and deepen faith.
11. Integrate youth culture with Bible study
  - a. Yearn for close relationship with God and Christ.
  - b. Promotion of Tongan language and culture
12. How to communicate the faith to younger persons?
13. Better communication between generations.

A *Narrative methodology* was used to reflect on the meaning of the focus group and questionnaire data. To flesh out the project story, data were added from the Lay Advisory Committee process, from the Site Visit, Drew faculty, and other research.

These inputs were woven together to provide us with a deeper, more accurate and reliable story of our young adult participation in the church. It was eye-opening, surprising, and moving to hear from our young people themselves what they really feel and think about participating in the worship and other activities of the church. It was also encouraging to receive their ideas about what might motivate them to participate more and have hope for the future of the church.

### **Evaluating the Questionnaire Data**

The team who staffed the administration of the questionnaire evaluated it. We were aware of the fact that the nature of the question often determines what answers are given. Therefore, we purposely used multiple-choice questions so that those who responded could easily give answers that reflected their life situations. For example, what is your age? A) 15-20 B) 21-30 C) 31-40 D) 41 and older.

As the three groups began their discussions, clarifications to the groups of our main focus was made to maintain non-biased review and reinforce what matters most: improvement of the church's future. Then and honest evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of our questionnaire was conducted:

Advantages of the Questionnaire as it is designed:

- a. Multiple choice
- b. Also have space for comments
- c. Excess in hard copies and network/online

Disadvantages of the Questionnaire as it is designed:

- a. The questionnaires had too many questions.
- b. Some of the questions were complicated
- c. Some terms used did not clarify definition/meaning for participants
- d. The questionnaires weren't available in Tongan language

Our group had a good time evaluating the questionnaires and tallying all of the responses. The surveyed group consisted of 300 Tongan young adults, 165 females and 135 males, ranging in ages from 18 to 40+ who considered themselves to be Tongan-American. These respondents resided in San Bruno and Palo Alto, California. They had a high school education, earned \$10,000 or less, regularly attended a Tongan-speaking Methodist Church and said that church attendance was necessary for Christians.

#### **What the Young People Shared on the Questionnaires:**

##### *Lack of English-Speaking Services and Other Worship Preferences.*

Amazingly, most of the survey results indicated that what needed to be changed in the church was length service, use of media, more leadership positions given to the youth such as in planning, conducting worship and programs. Male respondents were slightly less enthusiastic about obtaining leadership roles than females. The youth said the church needed to clarify the relevance of bible teachings to how youth live their lives. However, there was an overwhelming interest in the youth to use the bible as a guide for their lives. The youth survey stated they would like to see spiritual groups created for bible study. The integration of youth culture was strongly favored. Church gossip and drama were

said to be reduced if events brought together elder Tongan Christians and the youth for conversation and service to others. Listening to what the youth have to say, showing hospitality to everyone, and being serious about spiritual formation within the church community were favored by the youth. Gang influence was seen as a distraction from church values. Although 73% of youth understand the Tongan language, a combination of having both Tongan and English in the service plus speaking plain Tongan, seem to be possible solutions to involve the other 27% saying there is a language barrier that curbs their participation.

The youth favored or held promise for planned activities including Tongan cultural events for there was a concern for the loss of the Tongan language and culture. The youth said they seek a close relationship with God/Christ rather than the Tongan culture.

Suggestions offered by the youth to build meaningful connections between both generations were to have elders share stories of how God worked in their lives, role-model Christian behavior for younger members (lead by example), research other cultural churches that are dwindling in size because of their unwillingness to make changes, conduct a church survey to further study the problem, make connections to what interests people outside of church, and allow more input from the youth.

#### **Lay Advisory Committee Reflection the Data**

Most of the LAC are the key people of the church of First Tongan of San Bruno. We praise God for this newest opportunity for the church since the church was

established as a Tongan language service. These challenges we face in our local church may very well come to an end with these results. Finally, thanks to the research we have done, we know a lot more about the reality we face every day and how we might visualize the future of our church.

Below we move more deeply into our evaluation of the project by naming words that came to our minds as we went over the results of the questionnaires:

#### *Assumption*

First, it was surprising to study the research and the questionnaire's results. The insights that have come have revealed that the problem of dwindling interest of young adults in the church as been a challenge for years, but only now are we in a position to both understand the problem and do something about it. The fact is, we have assumed that the reasons why young people have lost interest in the church indicated their wrong attitudes and perceptions. In reality, there has been a failure of hospitality towards them made worse by a lack of effort and accountability from the leadership of the church.

#### *Regret*

Secondly, we had a moment of silence, Why?! We regret not doing the right things, such as spending time and asking the youth to come and lead the local church on these issues. Understanding the issue has now become real and effects on the church and migrating families. Exclusion of young adults from important functions of the church has been a waste of time for so many years. Now one can see the reality of our church situation and family life in America as it is. The scales have fallen from our eyes.

### *New Opportunity*

Those who worked on this project experienced a profound sense of gratitude for the results of these questionnaires. The knowledge and awareness gained from our research has helped to awaken church members to understand why young people are losing interest in the church. It was a great moment for us as leaders of the FTUMCSB church and the LAC. These results helped us to get on the same page and formulate some common ground.

### *Encouragement /Enlightenment*

The results of this research were both encouraging and enlightening. Our church can no longer plead wonderment at the lack of the presence of younger people in our church. Nor can we remain passive in the light of evidence that we have failed to provide a hospitable place and opportunities to serve for our young adults. The LAC plans to do things differently after reflecting on the data information. Changes must be made. Awareness of our present condition can greatly benefit the course of our future. The most interesting and hopeful characteristic of our church is our love for Christ. But we have struggled to embody our love for young people in ways that make them feel welcome and included. The LAC must stand together as present leaders of the church to work as a body of Christ and to build the body of Christ for the church. For the first time in memory our young people can now become involved in the church and exercise their own spiritual gifts.

### **The Project Site Visit and Challenges**

The Site Visit offered us a chance to bring together our findings from the project and define its challenges and solutions. We began the Site Visit with this basic question: “Why does our Young Tongan generation lose interest in church?” This was the main focus point of our Skype visit with Pastor Tevita Fotofili Vaikona’s Drew University Advisor, Dr. William Presnell. There was a group of people gathered together from important aspects of the church for this interview. It included the Secretary of the church, Chairman of the Pastor’s Committee, Lay Leader of the church, Spirit Leader of the Youth and Young adults, a Representative of the Young Married Couples of the Church, a Representative of a Young Adult Leader from a different church, and Two of our own Youth and Young Adult Leaders including myself the Pastor.

All of the participants were given an outline on what to expect from the interview and what questions might be asked. A little background on the Dr Presnell was shared, including on how he became the pastor's advisor. Dr. Presnell introduced himself as Pastor Tevita Fotofili Vaikona’s advisor, and we all went around for individual introductions.

After all of the introductions, Dr. Presnell asked, “What was the purpose of your ministry project?” Rather than responding directly, a query was proposed by Pastor Vaikona, “Why do young Tongan people lose interest in church?” The floor was open to anyone who wanted to add their point of view concerning what has been discovered about young adult participation from this project. Those present answered the question freely. Most of the concern centered our own Tongan language. On the one hand, our parents and elders don’t really don’t want the next generation of Tongans to lose our original language. They express a realistic fear that, if we lose our language, we lose the



richness and beauty of our distinctive culture. On the other hand, the second generation Tongans, having grown up in the American culture, have learned, spoken, written, and conducted their relationships in English, for the most part. Thus, they find it awkward, difficult, and strange at times to retain the Tongan language their parents taught them and to use it fluently as the language of the church.

I believe that, having conducted this research, our church's leaders appreciate even more the struggles of our young people to be both American citizens and also good stewards of Tongan culture. Yet, Tongan culture will be diminished or even vanish without their efforts. Therefore it is our hope that our church leaders continuously encourage our own Tongan and other ethnic people to keep their customs by continuing their services in their native languages and in all of the events they performed in their local churches. Where parents continue to teach the Tongan language to their children, we need to support and encourage them. Where no Tongan is taught or spoken in the home, we need to provide venues of language training for youth in Tongan and in the meanwhile interpret for them what is going on in the church in English as well as Tongan. It is our hope that such concrete actions will advance the aim of this project, which is to open wide the hospitality and involvement in our church to our upcoming generations of young people. In addition to our concern for preserving the Tongan language, we are also looking at many of our Tongan customs and traditions and urging our members to uphold them. Here, the same rationale applies for language. To lose our customs and traditions is to lose our culture. The way of presenting or carrying out the Word in traditional Tongan ways, is very much different from American ways. For instance, if Tongan parents talk, children are supposed to listen only and not talk back. So

if parents say anything to their child and the child talks back to the parents, this is considered to be disrespectful and will be punished. American parents expect their children to talk back, especially those of their children who are more grown. While parents may not like this, they tend to see it as a sign of independence and therefore do not punish it. They may set limits for the child, but remain flexible about what can be said back to them from their children. This is a basic example of how we must adjust our ways to compromise with the ultimate goal of Tongan churches.

Added to their concern for language and traditions, the young adults we studied registered their unhappiness with our church's worship. Our services were said to be "boring" for younger audiences. They are not fun enough to fit the expectations of the younger ages. Out of this study, good conversations with the youth about worship happened. Leaders offered to young people a new opportunity to participate by asking them to conduct the service, allowing them to talk and open up and share their experiences and testimonies. These significant changes were all highlighted for the young people in detail. It is hoped that this will make them feel valuable and important to the church.

Migrating to the U.S. with a very conservative upbringing often means that immigrant Tongans bring with them a certain closed-mindedness that seems to be part and parcel of the culture. But what may have been adaptive in Tongan culture may be maladaptive in the American culture. If we intend to reach out to young Tongan-Americans we surely need to be more open minded as leaders. It can be discouraging on how the Tongan culture tends to be so closed-minded. We don't accept things as they are. America is so diverse and yet we seem to elevate keeping our Tongan culture and

tradition exactly the same as an expectation for these young adults to meet. However, not minding the fact that we're in the midst of a mixture of different cultures, attitudes and perspectives on things has been our downfall. For example, the traditional Tongan dress code for young adults is not attractive for many members of Tongan youth. They have come to believe that religion and being a Christian is about what's in their heart, soul, and spirit and not so much how Tongans portray the faith externally.

All of the above concerns were shared in response to questions Dr. Presnell asked during the Skype Session. We were asked by the advisor to elaborate on the findings from the questionnaires distributed by Pastor Vaikona. During these reflections, most of us were looking back on where we came from, our origin on the island of Tonga, and how difficult it has been to bring up our children in this foreign country. Just as difficult for us has been trying to hold on to our customs and way of life. Being Tongan is a challenge itself because the beliefs, attitudes, tradition, and culture clash with American values poses conflicts for us. We understand this reality much more completely now than before this project.

We have to admit that as first generation Tongans we are not free to state our opinions. We are not open minded. We are very conservative. We do not want change. We are persistent that our tradition and culture be prolonged in this foreign country. But we do not interfere with how we are because we don't want change.

Lack of understanding within us Tongans is a challenge. Why? Because we have this certain Tongan mindset and mentality that makes it hard to accept new things.

The conflict of interest between Tongan culture and life in a new land is a challenge. Older and younger generations have different interests. The proposed project may be important for younger ages since they're interested in making changes. Older generations and parents aren't interested because they still prefer the usual ways of doing things.

At the end of the Site Visit Dr. Presnell, the Drew Advisor, praised Pastor Vaikona for the leadership he had given to the project. He also commented that the project had brought together the efforts of many church members and willing participation of many youth. He had heard that the church is on the cusp of a real transformation in the way it makes its Christian witness and addresses the inclusion of young people in all of its activities. He also remarked that all of these aspects of this research were sound and executed well and that Pastor Vaikona is ready to move on to the thesis writing phase of the Doctor of Ministry Program. Dr. Presnell congratulated Pastor Vaikona and his team for an outstanding job.

#### **Focus Group Opinion and Experience after the Questionnaire**

In addition to providing valuable input which enabled us to develop the questionnaire, the focus groups came together to reflect on the results gleaned from it. Below is the narrative summary of this process.

After conducting the initial questionnaire and a follow up interview with members of the focus group, it is clear to identify common opinions held by the sample. There are in fact, sociological, cultural, generational and economic barriers that hinder the youth's interest in the Tongan church. Furthermore, much of these issues are actually self-

inflicted stemming from church leaders' unwillingness to modify the curriculum/experience for younger demographics. Their input could be viewed as “negative” because of the rather harsh views that younger generations have towards the Tongan church. It is clear that if we wish to improve the well-being of these institutions and the people involved, we must neutrally digest any form of feedback from young people, regardless of its popular connotation. In brief, the focus group revealed important information that should be considered here. The young adults involved in the focus groups shared their impression of the Tongan church: 1. The leaders of the church are dishonest; 2. The church presents itself differently than what they see in other local churches; 3. There is no space for them in the church decisions; 4. They have no voice in the church; 5. They come to the church because their friends are in the church.

The opinions of the focus group acknowledge the sociological impact of migrating to America and how this coincides with the church's ineffectiveness. A primary concern expressed by the focus group was a lack of support of conducting church sermons to meet standards of American society. For instance, English is the chosen language by default in the United States but many Tongan church events are still held in traditional Tongan language. This becomes challenging for young adults who might wish to attend because many were taught English as their first language. Some members of the focus group could not speak Tongan at all but understood bits and pieces when listening to a Tongan speaker. Despite many members being raised in a home of Tongan speakers, American society encourages young people to master the English language and English is often a requirement to receive academic achievements, employment, and overall good quality of life in the U.S. According to my questionnaire summary, “Although seventy-

three per cent of youth understand Tongan well, a combination of having both Tongan and English in the service plus speaking plain Tongan, seem to be possible solutions to involve all the youth.”<sup>21</sup> Again, this issue is something that remains easily resolvable but many church leaders do not want to alter traditional social customs of the early Tongan temples. There could be less instruction held in Tongan linguistics and perhaps more resources for young attendants to learn their native language. One plausible solution is to write a transcribed version of the sermon in English that younger attendants could read while listening to the Tongan-speaking pastor/minister. Solutions such as these offer a fine compromise to fulfill the wishes of both parties while enhancing the linguistic capabilities of younger generations. Possible solutions will be discussed more in-depth in later sections but for now one must analyze a closely-related issue of culture.

Insistence by the first generation of Tongans on inflexibly preserving their cultural ways makes change difficult for young Tongan -Americans to find relevance in the church. Nearly identical to the former aspect of society, cultural differences present a serious pre- cursor to the lack of young attendants in Tongan church. Another major complaint about the church was how cultural values hinder the experiences of younger audiences. A traditional variable of Tongan life is that younger people are students and elders are the authority. Therefore, the majority of church sermons are conducted by older people and conversation is discouraged. This means that younger audiences are not expected to ask questions, offer insight or participate in the sermon in any way, shape or form. This has been discovered as a very unattractive aspect of the church for young people and plays a role on the low numbers of attendants. In addition, older generations

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<sup>21</sup> Vaikona, Tevita. *Restoring Interest and Participation of Young Adult Tongans in the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno, California*. 2015.

have not fully recognized that young people are not attuned to traditional Tongan culture. Sure, it has been part of their identity for quite some time but they have spent the majority of their lives in American culture. This means that the dominant influence on them has been the popular culture found in the United States. So, Second generation Tongan young adults cannot strongly relate to traditional Tongan customs. From the language to the cultural attire, young people almost feel out of place in a church that should embrace cultural differences without judgment. This leads into the next problem of generational contrasts: boredom of young people with traditional church community activities, including worship.

No one wants to be told that they are boring but this subject has been a prevailing issue between younger and older generations. In order to engage the younger demographics, one must be open to change and willing to learn entertaining outlets for them to participate in. These young people and their parents may have not fully embraced the idea of attending church. So not only do we find that there is no motivation from younger generations to attend nor is there any entertaining activity that would encourage them to return. The solutions lie in building a bridge between the younger and older generations. There is a lack of subjects and issues brought up that are applicable to what younger generations are presently encountering in their daily lives. The focus groups have expressed their opinion that older generations show some type of “superiority complex” that makes young people feel not valued, unappreciated and unwanted. This is not the type of message we should be sending our younger generations.

Expanding on one of the previous issues, young members of the church strongly believe that leaders are not able to correlate teachings of the Word with their present

problems in American society. This of course is because of the unwillingness of elders to understand the prevalent issues experienced by the youth. Older pastors and ministers have had difficulty accepting that the young members of the Tongan community have become acculturated to American customs. They go to American schools and watch American television. Unlike older generations and I myself, who seek to reconnect with our home islands, most of our young adults feel like America is literally their home. Fortunately, there is a passionate demand from younger members to understand the bible and connect it to their contemporary experiences. Rather than rejecting the Bible entirely, at least there is a level of willingness from this demographic to make connections to the bible and apply it to their life.

Understanding that young adults in this focus group were not college graduates and make less than \$10,000 a year signifies the importance of economics. It is not a stretch to say that a fair number of this group feel they can't afford church, and/or perceive that church leaders are materialistic at the expense of moral and spiritual witness. Many participants claimed that pastors were "unaffordable" and had financial demands outside of their budgets. Some have claimed that leaders of the church seem to put too much of an emphasis on "tithes" while neglecting Christian morals and messages. In addition, astigmatism may have developed based on their parents' experiences with Tongan churches. For example, members of the focus group stated that parents contribute entirely way too much to the church, leaving their homes financially unstable. This has caused younger generations to subconsciously and even consciously resent Tongan-American churches. Indeed, there should be less of an emphasis on church donations and more of a focus on true Christian values. Unfortunately, for younger people in our parish,



economic factors and past church experiences surrounding finances make church “not their first priority.”

Another aspect of American society that first generation Tongan American youth have become accustomed to is gang involvement. On the Pacific Islands, every member of the region was viewed as part of one church. This was the bond that brought them all together. However, in American culture, gangs have become a major competing influence in young people's schools, social events and even in the communities. This way of life has become something that church leaders must acknowledge as part of the youngsters' reality. In order to provide a healthier way of life and support, the church must become the dominant influence over gangs.

Still another area of the church that the youth has brought to our attention is the overwhelming degree of gossip in our organization. Members from both generations in the church discuss inappropriate topics unrelated to church intended for drama. Although some of this talk may seem innocent, it does not benefit the church in accomplishing the goal of becoming united. Members of the church need to be accountable for their reckless way with words and acknowledge that gossip is part of the problem. Furthermore, there should be an emphasis from church leaders that gossiping is not walking down the path of Christ. We need to be transparent about our feelings towards others rather than talking behind their backs. We need to promote positive healthy relationships between all attendants in the church in order to operate on the maximum level of efficiency. Not only does gossip cause division and tension among people attending service, but prevents the gossipers from ever working and growing themselves. They would much rather use

someone else as a “scape goat” to avoid their own flaws and insecurities. Issues like these need to be brought up in church and gossiping should be regulated accordingly.

Finally, another interesting variable that came into question in the focus groups was the length of church sermons. Given the busy schedules demanded to maintain in American society, young people feel that they are pressed for time. They want to attend church but can't afford to miss out on other social responsibilities such as going to school and working part/full time. In contrast to older people who may work less or are retired, young people are uncertain if the long duration of time needed to attend church is conducive to a good use of their time.

Overall, these focus groups revealed that they strongly favored a place in the church, even if it was at the smallest position of power. Planning and organizing events would be beneficial for the youth. Rather than elders assuming that this is back tracking or diluting the traditional customs of Tongan culture, we have to remind them of the reality. The youth have to be involved or else the future of our church will be in jeopardy. Moreover, it's important that older member who represent the opposition understand how this dynamic will improve the functionality of church practice. Church leaders will be able to do what they do best: preach the word of Christ; while the young adults could organize a more efficient way to be present through media platforms and marketing ideas to expand the church audience.

### **Other Research**

After investigating deeply the issue of gang involvement within the Tongan community, I came to some stunning conclusions. The first was that, in the San Francisco Bay Area, this is a rather contemporary phenomenon. Pacific Islanders in this region are struggling with the rise in gang involvement and gang violence. One author claimed that Pacific Islander gang involvement is often ignored or pushed to the side because, unlike Asians and Latinos, Tongans have been struggling with gangs for a much shorter amount of time. There is not a dedicated focus from law enforcement to comprehend the complex nature of Tongan gang involvement. The presence of a growing Tongan membership in gangs started around 2008 and 2009, specifically in San Bruno and San Mateo. Sources have found that some of them collaborate with Hispanic gangs to quarrel with cliques from South San Francisco. The article exclaimed, "Netane and Petaia, of the Samoan Community Development Center in San Francisco, said they didn't have the magic solution to reaching out to young Samoans and Tongans, but they offered some insight nonetheless."<sup>22</sup> In essence, they found their efforts to be ineffective because it's not an issue that church and social leaders are trained to deal with.

Church leaders have been historically known for remaining silent on these growing issues of the youth. They simply just don't know how to manage them or go about solving an issue foreign to traditional ways. Their only "gang" back home was the church community and there was no violence among other members of society. Salt Lake City and surrounding cities also have a high Tongan population and an increasing rate of gang violence. This could be due to a large number of Mormons in Utah and the influence of Mormon gang activity in Tongan culture. Many gang members in this region

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<sup>22</sup>. Myers, Anthony. San Mateo Forum Shines Light on Violence Among Pacific Islanders. 2011. San Mateo County Times. [http://www.mercurynews.com/ci\\_18203355](http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_18203355)

are devout Latter Day Saints (LDS). A curious and little understood reality is that traditional Mormon communities of faith seem disrupted, threatened, and negatively influenced by the same “Morman” gang mentality that wreaks havoc on young Tongan people. In 2005, one author highlighted the frequent amount of violent gang activity around Salt Lake City, Utah. The violence grew so large that leaders of the church were intimidated and fearful to run their usual services. Moreover, much of this violence took place during church and the writer of this article was shocked to discover that Mormon churches offered no form of response to this issue. The author angrily expresses, “I’ve never heard a sound plan to tackle the ever growing gang problems of LDS kids from the Stake leaders. Hey, the message of ‘go to church, pray, pay tithing, read your scriptures’ isn’t a realistic solution. It’s broken.”<sup>23</sup>

The final conclusion that I have found about gang involvement among the Tongan youth is that it often is used to fill a void of family disengagement. In other words, when there is a lack of family support at home, the youth turns to gangs rather than church. According to one study, “street-socialized urban youth are likely to become part of gang communities. It has been illustrated that due to inter-generational transmission of street-related normative behavior, territorial power-fights between youth gang members, such as Tongans and Samoans, continue to be reiterated today.”<sup>24</sup> The youth are vulnerable to gang influence when living in impoverished neighborhoods and the majority of families attending church are living below poverty lines. Because their environment is filled with

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<sup>23</sup> Wolfgramm, Richard. “Church Leaders Silent on Tongan Gang Violence.” 2005. Pacific Islands Report. <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2005/July/07-29-com.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Betz, Elisabeth. “Tongan Gang Families: Street-Socialisation and the Inter-Generational Transmission of Street-Related Normative Behaviour.” 2013. <https://www.tasa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Betz.pdf>

gang influence, young people have higher chances of becoming involved with gangs. The primary conclusion of this study confirmed that young gang members turn to gangs as “alternative families” outside of church. Therefore, it is imperative that a strong bond is formed to replenish the broken family values in the young Tongan community.

## Chapter 5

### CONTEXTUAL ISSUES BETWEEN PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Much of the concentration of this study has been on what seems to be a longstanding divide between first generation traditional Tongan leaders and the very different young adult Tongans who are their children or those who are of the second generation of Tongans in the United States. As we looked at the emerging project story, certain themes that characterize this divide seemed to recur. Below we turn our attention to the conflicts identified between the young adults we studied, and their parents.

#### **External Transition to Internal:**

As much as things change, there are many aspects of life that remain the same. Likewise, there are biblical principles that can ground people in the faith as practiced in their Tongan heritage that can be appropriated in new forms by new generations of Tongan-Americans. There are fundamental guidelines that the Israelites displayed which could still be applied today. Transitioning from the Tongan national experience to contemporary times makes these principles significant and even more profound. By analyzing the Holy Bible, readers are able to ingest a handful of lessons providing more clarity on the state of our churches and the First Tongan United Methodist Church.

*1<sup>st</sup> Principle: A person's background influences their future*

As discussed in previous chapters, some of the youth's apathetic attitude towards attending church stems from how they were brought up. In various books of the Old and New Testament, the readers discover that much of the character's actions and attitudes are determined by God's promises. For instance, Joshua and Caleb were certain about claiming a region for their own based on personal relationships with God. They both were influenced by God's word and pursued this ambition diligently. Therefore, these two characters acted according to their past perception of self and attempted to create their future. Young people presently find church unappealing because very few were encouraged to participate at a younger age. Thus, the strong influence of valuing church and matters of faith is lacking at home, the citadel where children learn how to live in the future.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Principle: Patience is a Virtue*

The truth is that many of our church leaders are impatient with the younger generations. Pastors feel as if young people should conform to their standards rather than attempting to understand younger demographics and ways of thinking. It is clear to see the fallacy in being impatient and not making the adjustments necessary for perfection. In Genesis, God told Abram that his people would be held captive as slaves in a foreign place for 400 years. Indeed, the Israelites were enslaved in Ancient Egypt for a little over 400 years until they were finally released from Bondage by Moses. Those individuals held in captivity had to remain patient until the prophecy was fulfilled and in the mean time, were forced to make adjustments while waiting. In addition, Moses and his followers wandered in the wilderness for 40 years moving diligently towards the Promised Land.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Principle: Position Yourself Effectively*

Older generations have a tendency of sticking to what they know. They are generally not willing to reassume their positions on subjects or approaches. It is easy to keep doing what works but how could one ever grow or improve from such a philosophy? In Joshua 3: 3-4 the Israelites were told to move from their “positions” and follow Moses to the Promised Land. It's important to understand that despite being slaves for over four centuries, the Israelites were still very much accustomed to their occupations in Egypt. Changing positions can be difficult and scary even if the change is a positive one. In addition to the biblical wisdom stated above, it is also desirable that influential church leaders keep in mind the contrasts between their old ways of relating to their culture and the contemporary ones now occupied by their young adults. Below are contrasts that we feel that enlightened church leaders should consider.

#### **Oral (words) Culture to Image Culture**

According to an early science fiction writer, Marshall Mchulan believes that, “multimedia technology has advanced to the point where literacy, the ability to read or write, is no longer necessary or common.” He defined this as a “postliterate society” in the early 1960's and this is something that is manifesting itself in contemporary times<sup>25</sup>. The standard of power point presentations, screen projectors, computers and other media resources have replaced the spoken word of priests and pastors. Most of the information is not coming directly from the source but instead is being recycled and reused for visual

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25. “Post Literate Society.” Wikipedia. Web.



digestion. This allows the original text or meaning of artifacts to become altered and/or tampered with at an even higher level than before. What exactly was the historical progression of an idea or concept and how did it take place within the church? This is hard to discover today.

Prior to the reformation period, various temple designs, idols, pictures and visual glass graphics were used to convey the word<sup>26</sup>. After the Reformation period there was a stronger emphasis on reading and writing to communicate Christian/Early Judaic faith. Now we have transitioned into the digital era where large screens are used to quote bible verses, reveal the lyrics of church songs and display a plethora of images for instructional purposes. The World Wide Web is the vehicle used to convey information similar to how printed documents were used during the reformation period. What does this mean for Tongan churches and how does this correlate with the preferences of a younger audience?

A big obstacle for pastors is being able to present church related material in a fashion that engages younger audiences. For the first time in history, students of the church (younger adults) can now be used to educate the pastors and priests on technology and its uses for education. This truth encourages a more collaborative strategy between members of the church and its leaders. This presents a more effective way to bond and interact with younger generations in the church.

### **Community to Individual:**

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<sup>26</sup>. Ross, Leslie. *Art and Architecture of the World's Religion*. Greenwood Press. 2009.

Older generations held an entirely different view, for the most part, on what mattered most in their lives. Baby Boomers were focused on religious duties, respecting authority/institutions and maintaining strong communities/families. In contrast, Generation X'ers and the Millennials have been generally viewed as more individualistic.

According to the, “The American Freshman project, part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), has surveyed a nationwide sample of first-year students at four-year colleges or universities in the fall every year since 1966.”<sup>27</sup> In relation to life goals, younger generations have held a stronger emphasis on finances. Since 1989, becoming wealthy has been consistently ranked the #1 most important goals of life. Discovering “meaning and purpose of life” has dropped from #3 to #6 since the early 1970's. Additionally, starting a family and maintaining strong marriages and households have decreased in importance compared to Baby Boomers. Overall studies find that, “life goals related to intrinsic values were lower among Millennials compared to Boomers at the same age.”

There was also a slight decrease in younger generations' empathy levels compared to Baby Boomers. Younger participants expressed being less likely to contribute donations, joining an occupation that would benefit social issues, eat less to improve the

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<sup>27</sup>. Twenge, et al. “Personality Processes and Individual Differences: Generational Differences in Young Adults' Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966 –2009.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2012, Vol. 102, No. 5, 1045–1062 2012 American Psychological Association 0022-3514/12/\$12.00 DOI: 10.1037/a0027408. Web.

current state of starvation in underdeveloped countries and express compassion to other groups.

In regards to “civic orientation and social capital, “younger generations scored lower than previous participants. Millennials were found less likely to, “participate in the political process through voting, writing to a public official, participating in demonstrations or boycotts, or giving money to a political cause”<sup>28</sup> Older generations reported higher to have already participated in politics in comparison to Millennials and Generation X. Lastly, younger generations were less likely to reduce utility consumption (I.E. heating and central air) or execute personal effort to improve the environmental circumstances of society.

Although some areas scored higher with younger generations than older ones, the incentive was more extrinsic than internal fulfillment. For example, “being a leader in the community”<sup>29</sup> was the largest mean increase between Baby Boomers and Millennials. However, the underlying factor of becoming a communal leader correlated with fame and narcissism.

**Knowledge to Experience (Ministry of Word to Image):**

Older generations were seen as more concerned with religious dogma and the actual teachings of the God’s word and the doctrines drawn from it. This allowed many elders to grow adept in the theological and academic background of Christianity. Young adults are less concerned about this knowledge and are attracted to “experiencing”

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<sup>28</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Twenge, et al. *Ibid.*

Christianity. In other words, young adults are attempting to gain a “relationship” with God rather than learning about God through ancient doctrines.

Tom Beaudion and his colleague Wade Roof, in commenting on millennials, say, “They are inclined to regard their own experiences as superior to the accounts of others, and truth found through self-discovery as having greater relevance to them than those handed down by custom and creed.”<sup>30</sup> What researchers have discovered is that young adults are not very interested in learning about another’s interpretation about God. They are more concerned with discovering for themselves and this is something that local and national churches have not provided. Therefore, church leaders should consider using their personal experiences in sharing their faith to support the youth while encouraging them to encounter the glory of God first hand.

**Conviction to Mission:**

Younger generations are seen less convicted to the original teachings of Christ found in the Holy Scriptures. Observations and studies concur that young adults pursue the mission of their “spiritual calling” and the church more than the word itself. Rather than staying faithful to their denomination, in this case Protestant denominations, younger demographics are focused on the group and personal organization they belong to. Taking it a step further, young adults may not even belong to a group and still perpetuate their own personal mission in life. Of course, some of these individuals justify

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<sup>30</sup> Forbes, David Bruce. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. University of California Press. 2005. 145. Web.

these missions as a religious or spiritual duty but remain isolated from a church or organization.<sup>31</sup>

**One-Dimension to Multi-Dimension:**

As society moves further down the timeline, it is useful to identify the divisive categories of identity and how it these have impacted the U.S. More options and selections to choose from is part of the innovative pattern present in modern society. A basic example would be that rather than people considering themselves “American,” they may classify their nationality related to their ancestral country. People are moving into an era where they can virtually customize their identity based on this multi-dimensional reality.

Gender equality is a major indication of this transition. For centuries, the world has been dominated by a patriarchal ideology. However, men and women alike are urging America and the rest of humanity to balance out the spectrum between both genders. Women are becoming more involved in positions of power, diverse professions, and leadership roles than ever before.

The struggle for racial equality is another aspect of society that can be presently witnessed and harnessed with an innate desire for diversity. Although this country was referred to originally as a “melting pot” of various cultures and racial backgrounds, this has been hindered by political and socioeconomic indifferences. Yet, we are fast becoming racially as well as culturally blended. Multi-racial and/or interracial couples are at the highest percentage in America's history. In 2010, 15% of the American public were

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<sup>31</sup>. Eckman, Jim. Religious Convictions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Issues in Perspective*. 2012. Web.

dating outside of their race and a little over 12% are married outside of their race.<sup>32</sup> In 1958, only 4% of U.S. citizens approved of dating outside of their race.<sup>33</sup>

Lastly, multi-dimensional attitudes towards religion are visible all across the nation. Although Christianity, or a similar denominational form of it, is widely practiced in America; but people are reaching out and embracing other belief systems. The idea of “co-existing” among a diverse religious audience is challenging for traditional church organizations to grasp. Nevertheless, this reality must be accepted and applied in order for these groups to survive.

#### **Top to Bottom to Bottom to Top:**

Mostly heard about in the workforce, a “top to bottom” approach is a more authoritarian point of view adopted by older generations. The concept is simple: the people at the top make the demands and the people below follow it without question. Organizations in virtually every industry are beginning to adapt to the times and popular trends for equality. Because of this, “bottom to top” is seen as a more collaborative approach between both parties.

People on the lowest level of the “work chain” now feel more actively involved with the organization and leverage on what happens within the social environment. Because of this, there has been improved relationship building and growth within many organizations.

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<sup>32</sup>. Wang, Wendy. “The Rise of Intermarriage.” Pew Research Center. 2012. Web.

<sup>33</sup>. Newport, Michael. “In U.S., 87% Approve of Black-White Marriage, vs. 4% in 1958.” *Gallup*. 2012. Web.

Rather than pastors and church leaders announcing their superiority and almost literally “talking down” to their audience, churches need to figure out how to merge both parties together for optimal efficiency. This can be done by having the younger audiences participate in active roles of the church and providing feedback on potential improvements for the organization.

## **Chapter 6**

### **THE FUTURE FOR THE FIRST TONGAN UMC OF SAN BRUNO**

I was at a workshop hosted by the Pacific Islander Ministry of the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. This was a sad time for me, because I found out that my own brothers and sisters of the Pacific Islanders are struggling to understand why Tongan young people have lost interest in our Tongan and Pacific Islander local churches. However, since conducting this study I am encouraged that there is a path forward.

Based on the results of this study and the programs and relationships I had already developed with this group, the future looks bright for ministry to the young adults of our area. I am excited for our new image of the Tongan Church of San Bruno. The group that has been instrumental in planning and carrying out this project with me has already proposed a plan that goes far beyond what I initially imagined our group was willing to accomplish. Although the proposal will take a different route to make it happen, I have already seen how it has been put into practice with the young people of the church. For instance, I see the positive movement from the whole church by their approving most of the young people's programs that we proposed. As the church members start to open their eyes and try to cope with the younger generation of today, things are flowing into place. There has been a huge transition in the relationships between the older generations and the young people of



this church. The future holds a lot for this church. This project will immensely benefit and influence the future leaders of the church, who are our young people.

### **Benefits of the Project.**

A couple months after I addressed the Lay Advisory Committee about this project, the church slowly started to see the benefits of this whole project. It has awakened the whole congregation from their unvoiced struggles within the church. The church seems to notice for the first time in many years, that forcefully preserving our traditions and culture is blinding the Tongan church members from seeing how they have discounted and excluded the young people of the parish. The older and younger generations of the church seem to be collaborating to make a shift happen.

The young people have pulled themselves together with the full power of the Holy Spirit and requested a Council Meeting of the church. They want to have an English service. The voices of the young people have come together to awaken the church from their old mentality, but they have attempted to make it a peaceful transition. The English service is drawing people back to the church. Insisting that their voices actually be heard is a huge accomplishment to the young people. To be heard, accepted, and counted, benefits these young individuals in so many ways.

The congregation and especially the young adults of the church have found from this project that most of the neighborhood has been wanting to attend an English-speaking service. Apparently, being a largely non-Tongan community has discouraged

them from attending a service in their community that is exclusively Tongan-speaking and traditional. Even though they had to travel some distance, they sought out churches in other communities that provided more comfortable English services. It was the best moment for the church to discover what an asset we have in the church, and that God has prepared it for an English service that will serve all of San Bruno.

Catching the momentum of the project, we established an English service, with full support from the parents and traditionalists. We see the incredible talents of the young people. They use their voices when they lead this service and the children ministry with full power. I see the multiple talents of the young people, their compassion, and their passion for serving God.

The young people have also created a new ministry called “Collective 24”. This ministry is for those who are homeless and are in need in the community. This Ministry involves cooking food and feeding the homeless every Sunday morning. Food is delivered to those in need, and the needy are provided with toiletries, warm blankets, and socks to survive the whole week ahead. Providing for and feeding people in need with physical and spiritual food is their main focus. This has been an exceptional benefit to those who are not able to walk into a church without being judged by their physical appearance.

The young people also run their bible study every Monday, with one of our trained leaders who is willing to guide them. This bible study is very powerful and effective for the young people, who seek God through the Word of God. The bible study is related closely to Methodist doctrine and is uplifting and energizing for participants.

There are also five young individuals who are trained for the lay speaking or Lay Servant role designated by the United Methodist Conference. They rotate every Sunday to deliver the message from the pulpit. Most of them respond to God's calling and to be a servant and to preach the word of God to the people of the world.

Since our English Service has been established, this is the only Tongan church so far that has formed up an English service for the young people. We hope there will be more. The young generation who grew up in America with English as their first language have appreciated this new service immensely. It helps them to understand and know what the word is all about. One of the great features of this project is that it has advocated for the broadening of spiritual outreach. Our church is no longer limiting the preaching of the gospel to Tongans only, but also to anyone who seeking God in our community.

This project benefits most of the young people who had moved away from the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno, and are now returning to the church. Young people feel they have their own voice and space in the church. They also learn from their own experiences and how their daily walk with God is mediated by the language they know and understand best.

### **Vision for the Future**

Since we are making a difference already at the First Tongan United Methodist of San Bruno, the future of the church is becoming much clearer. We know what things look like now and can see the outlines of the near future. I see that the gifts and talents of

many members of the young adults can be used in many different aspects of the church. (e.g. compassion for people in need, leadership gifts, voices and music gifts, preaching gifts, serving gifts, dance, giving, prayer, art in culture action song, and many others)

We have formed a preaching class to train lay speakers, so that young adults of our church who feel called to a preaching ministry can learn more of how to do it well and be supported in their learning.

Our youth-led bible studies allows our congregants to study the word of God together at the same table and find solutions for living from the bible. Particularly, young people have a place and time to study the bible and apply it to their daily problems. In community they are encouraging one another from the word of God. The bible study enables them to contextualize their learning to their own situation and spread the blessings of their devotion to others.

We have also instituted a Doctrine Class. It provides younger adults and youth a chance to study the basic doctrines of Methodism. Twice a month we provide them with materials and review their notes each time they return to the class. They are learning the importance of church order and discipline and why they became United Methodists.

We now provide what we call Positive Social Outlet –a program that offers positive and uplifting activities for young adults where they can pray, play and enjoy various aspects of life. This is an outreach from our church which we call Fellowship with church Community aimed at drawing young adults and youth from our own church community to fellowship with us and to enhance their spiritual and social growth.

We have many challenges ahead of us as a church. But we find that the challenges can be met by the combination of individual efforts by our members. Through the willingness to form and sustain positive relationships with the young people of the church and the local community, we as the church work together to build and reshape relationships, friendships, families, responsibilities. These faith-based actions are founded on love, respect, honesty and humility. Some of the key points from plans that direct the future of this project are:

1. Building relationships with God. A broad spectrum of our church's relationships will be looked at, and hopefully improved. This includes husbands and wives, parents and children, church members, the community, use of mentors, teachers, teamwork, and partnerships.
2. Developing life skills and goal setting with real outcomes in critical relationships such as family, career, job, church, and community.
3. Focusing on the needs of Children, ages K-12, mentoring them in handling responsibilities, respect for self and others, childcare, monitoring for suitable activities (e.g. Movies-TV) making them aware of support systems (with family, and outside the family), crime prevention, handling conflict/resolution, relationship among pre-teens and teens, individuality, homework, handling bullying, safety, goal setting, positive influences, confidence and self-esteem, health and hygiene, culture and the context.
4. We will closely examine the needs of young adults 18-20. We will determine how the church could be responding to their education, employment, cultural differences,

career and goal setting, positive images, mentoring of others, connect with elderly, community service, relationship with parents, dating and future spouses, respect for and communication with others, ministry of images, and lay servant roles.

5. We will consider implementing a Church-wide bible study. Its purpose will be to encourage members to have more knowledge of the Bible. An offshoot of this will be a preaching class for those who feel they are called to preach the word and follow a more rigorous spiritual discipline. Members of this group will be asked to faithfully read the Sunday Bible Texts, fast once a week, learn the proper approach to the community, visit the elderly people in the church, and gain education for parenting the children who grew up in America. They will also be encouraged to be good servants in and out of the church and live a missionary life every day and become fishers of men (and women) in the Kingdom of God. They will be led in being prepared in and out of the season, in praise and worship, and will attend cross cultural workshops.

6. Young adults will participate in Community-Second Harvest (serving foods for the community). They are already opening an English service to the community, and learning appropriate ways to witness to, and serve, community. They are seeking ways to enhance the spiritual and social growth of other young adults in the community.

7. Our church will attempt to partner with other Methodists in our Shalom Zone, especially in praise and worship. But we are also interested in being partners in the Just Serving and Immigration Task force. We will pursue cross-cultural training and summer school for Pacific Islanders.

8. We will be initiating social outlets and activities and service for the families of varying circumstances in our parish. This will encompass parent night, out movies and outings, and programs to provide young adults with babysitting during worship and church events. We will propose that once a month, parents have at least one night out without having to pay for a baby sitter. This is to enhance the quality of time they spend together and have an outing without the children.

9. We will arrange for special events on special days in the calendar year, such as Valentine Day, Mother's Sunday, Father's Sunday, and White Sunday. Parents will treat the youth and all the children together in celebration and fun. They will provide babysitting . All parents and adults of the church (single or married) will celebrate together as church family. The reasoning behind these intergenerational activities is not only to bridge generational and cultural differences, but also give the young adults 1 experience with the struggles of parenting and the responsibilities of taking care of children. It will also allow the young adults to learn how to meet the needs of the children before they start having their own little families. It is hoped that they will learn the basics of caring for infants and taking on the responsibility of becoming an adult. Finally, we want to teach the young people to learn how to share their time, gifts and graces with one another.

Secondly, the older parents will certainly feel the support from other generations, as well as the young people of the church. We anticipate that these joint activities will foster trust between parents and their young adults as they live in one family of faith. Sometimes we fail to teach ourselves to trust our young adults and youth. But they are

our future and need to be included and cared for. If we expect them to assume the leadership of our faith community in the future, we need to encourage, train, nurture, and support them, and show them how to be responsible adults and leaders.

As we planned for what the First Tongan Church of San Bruno would look like when we included this transformative program for young adults, we continued to think seriously about, and process, the future of our young adults and youth. As they share their gifts and graces, we are delighted to see that they are keeping open minds to the work of the Holy Spirit. This same Spirit has already done marvelous things among the people of San Bruno United Methodist Church and has lifted young adults out of their more passive role to places of strong and effective leadership in our church's ministry. It continues to lead and guide all of us, and has completely turned around the way our community makes a difference in the lives of other people.



## Conclusion

For as long as I can remember, the church was the foundation that held everything together. Coming from the Islands of Tonga, church gatherings was what made the community united while inheriting scriptural knowledge of early Christian life. When I was growing up, church was most certainly a family requirement but was always something I naturally gravitated towards. I loved the energy, the conversations and the friendships that would come from the church community. Needless to say, the church wasn't just part of our culture; it *was* our culture and still to an extent remains the pinnacle of Tongan life.

Being involved in the church at a young age to eventually becoming a pastor has enabled me to experience the entire scope of ministry progression. Starting with outside influences that took place decades ago that divided the once united community to Tongan-American ministries; it seems like I've seen it all. However, I do know that I am not the first and will definitely not be the last to analyze and hopefully improve the state of Tongan churches. An area of focus that concerned me and felt was a growing issue was the lack of Tongan-youth in our Tongan-American churches.

Throughout the years, days seem like the blink of an eye and years seem like a brief nap. My days have become so systematic and revolving around the church that it's easy to notice any minor alterations. I couldn't help but recognize that young people were disappearing from our church audience and support from the youth was slim. There were just simply not enough of them to begin with, and numbers kept decreasing. Very few

members of the church faculty were oblivious to these changes but they did little to address it. I didn't want to imagine a future where local Churches of Methodist Tongans were not handed off to their kin. There had to be reasons behind the actions executed from these young members.

Rather than preparing for the worst, I brainstormed solutions. I spoke about these ideas with like-minded staff members and friends. After much deliberation I concluded that we need to speak with the youth to better understand how to tackle this issue. Not really knowing what to expect, I learned that our Tongan-American youth operate on a completely different thought process than their ancestors. I had to find a way to relate with them and figure out how the church could become a beneficial vehicle to do so.

This was when the motivation to initiate focus groups started to unfold. After approaching the First Tongan Church of San Bruno Council Committee, I was approved for temporary time off to focus on the project. I attempted to focus on young adults from the ages of 18-35 who were no longer attending church or hardly showed up or fit the description of the target audience. I assigned Mark Squire and Mele Finau as focus group leaders and they underwent training on how to properly conduct them. When all was said and done, the primary ages limited to 18-25 and a little over 200 youth members of Tongan churches participated.

In groups consisting of about 12 people plus the group leader, youth members were questioned on subjects from questionnaires. This would lead to further discussion for deeper insight and qualitative data. The answers offered from members of this sample were eye-opening and revealed that much of the problem was self-inflicted.

A primary cause of this issue was the resistance to holding services in the English

language. The Tongan language was generally the only tongue spoken in church. This of course wasn't great for youth members who spoke English as their first language or did not have full understanding of Tongan linguistics.

In conjunction with this, the traditional way of doing things was interfering with the church's willingness to grow and involve the youth in that growth. Tongan customs basically have elders as the authority with very little room for youth involvement. These beliefs trickled into American church settings and made young people turn away from the ministry.

Moreover, the traditional way of conducting church services were seen as too "boring" for the Tongan youth. There was not enough activity to engage them and keep them excited about attending church.

Finally, another big reason for the absence of our young adults was that the church was seen as unable to provide any advice applicable to first generation Tongan-American youth. The topics were not practical to what they were experiencing in America. Therefore, the church was not seen as a viable source of support for young members.

Once these results were brought to the attention of church leaders, everyone started to take action. We immediately launched an English-speaking service that served any members seeking to attend church outside of Tongan linguistics. The youth initiated their own ministry named "Collective 24" that provided support for the homeless along with members of the church community. Young people started to be assigned key responsibilities in the church such as leading bible study and becoming lay speakers.

This project has revealed so much and confirmed many of my theories prior to its

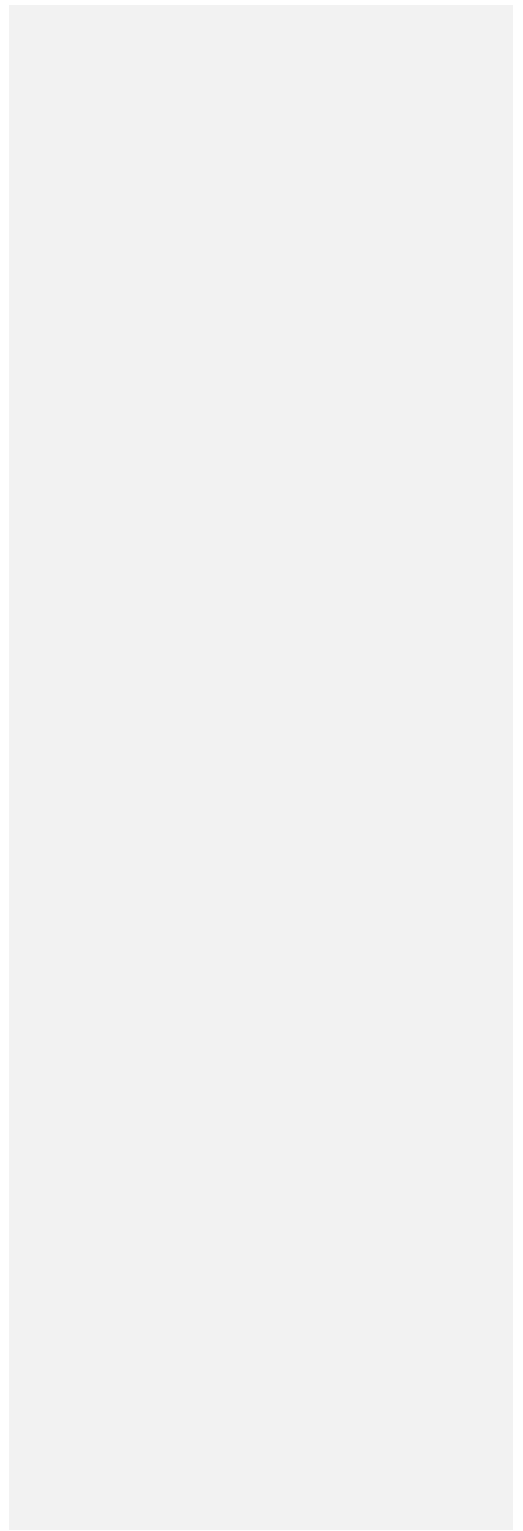
occurrence. The entire process has made the church closer with the youth and has allowed innovation to introduce itself at a rapid pace. We do see an increased attendance of young church members but intend to expand on these ideas to maximize the numbers even further. We all hope that this data will serve helpful to churches undergoing similar circumstances and seeking possible solutions.

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**APPENDICES**



### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **“Restoring Interest and Participation of Young Adult Tongans in the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno” FOCUS GROUP**

##### **Invitation to participate in a research study**

Researcher Tevita Fotofili Vaikona, a student at Drew University, invites you be part of a research project that he will conduct in order to complete requirements for an advanced degree. The project looks at reasons for attendance or non-attendance at the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno. The purpose of the study is revitalize interest and participation in the church. We are asking you to participate because your views are of value to the study.

##### **Description of your involvement**

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in one focus group session at the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno. We will invite 8 to 10 people to meet together to discuss their experiences and ideas. The discussion topics include will included the significance of the Church. We will also talk about religious views. A member of the research team will help guide the discussion. The focus group will last about one and a half hours and we will record the discussion to ensure accuracy. You must agree to be recorded to participate in the focus group.

##### **Benefits**

While you may not receive a direct benefit from participating in this research, some people find sharing their stories to be a valuable experience. We hope that this study will contribute to the improvement of Church.

##### **Risks and discomforts**

Answering questions or talking with others about religious beliefs can be difficult. You may choose not to answer any discussion question and you can stop your participation in the focus group at any time.

While unlikely, there is a chance that another member of the focus group could reveal something about you or your family that they learned in the discussion. All focus group members are asked to respect the privacy of other group members. You may tell others that you were in a focus group and the general topic of the discussion, but actual names and stories of other participants should not be repeated.



**Compensation**

As this is an academic study, there is no monetary compensation available. However, we will provide cakes, cookies and coffee.

**Confidentiality**

We plan to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you or your family member. To keep your information safe, the recording of the focus group will be placed in a locked file cabinet until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created. The researchers will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected to protect the information. To protect confidentiality, your real name and your family member's name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. The researchers intend to keep this study data, and the recordings for future research.

**Voluntary nature of the study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer a focus group question for any reason.

**Contact information**

If you have questions about this research, including questions about the scheduling of the focus group, you can contact Tevita Fotofili Vaikona at the First Tongan United Methodist Church of San Bruno, 560 El Camino Real, San Bruno, CA 94066 (phone 650-873-2192; email [teviumc@live.com](mailto:teviumc@live.com)).

For inquiries about this consent form or other Drew University Internal Review Board concerns contact Dr. Kate Ott at: [kott@drew.edu](mailto:kott@drew.edu)

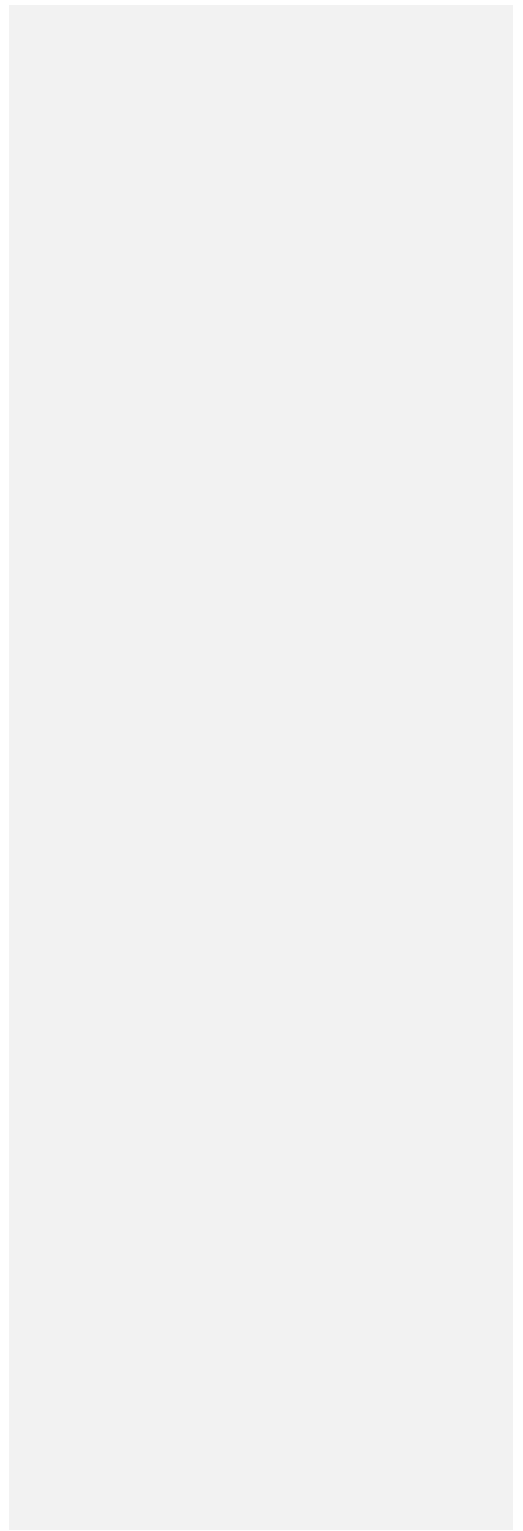
**Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in the study. As part of my consent, I agree to be recorded.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



### Focus Group Questions

- Do you look forward to going to church? Why? Why not?
- Why is the purpose of going to the Local Church?
- What would make the experience of attending church more enjoyable?
- Do you feel you have much in common with the rest of the congregation?
- How would you feel if the church were forced to close its doors?
- Do you believe in God?
- Do you think that the Methodist church is healthy?
- If you had a serious personal or health problem, would you consider turning to a Methodist minister?
- Have ever considered joining another church?
- Are many of your friends churchgoers?
- What you like the church to look like?
- Where is God in this entire situation?

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### General questions

1. What is your age?
  - a. 15-20
  - b. 20-30
  - c. 40 or older
2. What is your yearly income level?
  - a. 0-10,000
  - b. 10,000-40,000
  - c. 40,000 and higher
3. Do you consider yourself primarily American or Tongan?
  - a. American
  - b. Tongan
  - c. Tongan-American
4. What is your educational level?
  - a. High School or High School diploma
  - b. College degree
  - c. Post-graduate study or degrees
5. Do you speak Tongan?
  - a. I don't speak Tongan
  - b. I speak and understand a little Tongan
  - c. I speak and understand Tongan well
6. Are you married?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes
  - c. I am not married but live with a partner
7. Are you a member of a church?
  - a. I am a member of a Tongan Church
  - b. I am a member of a non-Tongan church
  - c. I am not a member of any church
8. If you are married or have a partner, is your partner a member of a church?
  - a. He/she is a member of a Tongan church
  - b. He/she is a member of a non-Tongan church

c. He/she is not a member of any church

9. Do you attend church?

- a. Regularly
- b. Sometimes
- c. Inactive in attendance

10. If you attend church or are inactive, do you consider yourself a Christian?

- a. Yes
- b. Maybe, I am thinking about it
- c. No

11. In general, do you think that regular attendance at church is necessary for Christians?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I have no opinion

12. If you attend church, what kind of church do you attend?

- a. A mainline Protestant church
- b. A conservative Protestant church
- c. I do not attend any church

13. If you attend church, do you prefer Tongan or English services?

- a. Tongan
- b. English
- c. It doesn't matter to me, I am comfortable with either

Further comments on the above questions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Social Factors questions**

14. Do you feel that the use of Tongan language in church services is a problem for English-speaking Tongan youth?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. It may be a problem to some, but it does not bother me

15. Do you prefer Tongan language or English language worship services and programs?

- a. Tongan

- b. English
- c. A combination of Tongan and English would be better for all

16. If you have conflict with parents, how much of it is about attending a Tongan church?

- a. A little
- b. A lot
- c. I don't have much conflict with parents

17. Given that your parents may be "old school" Tongans, what do you feel the church might do to bridge the gap between your parents' experience and yours?

- a. Provide ways to include younger people in planning and conducting worship and programs
- b. Provide events that bring elder Tongan Christians and younger ones together for conversation and service to others
- c. Both of the above, plus balance the use of Tongan language with English in design of worship and programs.

18. Are you involved in activities for youth in the church? What language you prefer to use?

- a. Tonga language
- b. English Language
- a. Both Languages

For further comments on the above questions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

19. Is our parents' generation willing to bridge the generational gap?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. maybe

For further comments on above question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20. How does a young Tongan's Integration (more or less) into American society influence the life of the young person?

- a. Very Influential
- b. Moderate Influence
- c. No influence at all

21. Gangs draw the young people away from the church when youth are facing social problems such as drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, joblessness, injustice to immigrants, language barriers

- a. I agree

- b. I disagree
- c. Maybe there are other reasons

For Further comment on question above: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Economic Factor questions**

22. Do you work?

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. If yes please state part time/ fulltime \_\_\_\_\_

23. Are you capable of being financially independent?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c.

Please explain your reason: \_\_\_\_\_

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24. If you are capable of being financially independent, should you contribute to the church's financial needs?

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. Other (Please state other reason) \_\_\_\_\_

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25. How much time do you spend on average, dedicating your time to the church yearly?  
(Spending or donated to the church) but didn't support the children need)

- a. About 5-10 hours
- b. About 15-45 hours
- c. More than 45 hours

26. Of the time that you contribute to the church, how much do you focus on the needs of the children?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Never

Please indicate what you do to fulfill your contributions: \_\_\_\_\_

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27. Does the matter of adequate housing affect the way you contribute to the church and individual financial needs?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I have adequate housing

Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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28. Does your financial stability affect your desire to feed the hungry?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not feel that feeding the hungry is my responsibility

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29. Do you feel less obligated to continue furthering your education because of the lack of money?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (State reason why): \_\_\_\_\_

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30. Is it difficult for you to find a job?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I am not looking for a job

31. Does lacking a job affect how you contribute to the church?



- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not lack a job

**Cultural Factor questions**

32. What are your fears about future generations and their lack of enrichment of the Tongan culture?

- a. Future generations will lose Tongan language and culture
- b. Tongans will miss out on some distinctive and important teachings of the Tongan church and culture
- c. I have no fears for the future of Tongans

For further comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

33. As new generations of Tongans emerge, do you think it's important to value the presence and thoughts of our elders?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I have no relationship with elders

34. Do you as an individual, doubt our elders?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

35. When youth lack respect for their elders, what are reasons?

- a. Elders trivialize youth and do not allow them to speak or act freely
- b. Youth are too immature to realize the values elders try to communicate
- c. There is misunderstanding due to lack of contact and conversation

36. What are ways we can integrate our Tongan identity with American standards, without fully assimilating to them, to feel comfort in church settings?

- a. First study and understand Tongan and American cultures fully, then have conversations about choices
- b. Get Tongans to understand that they are now Americans and have to fit in
- c. I don't feel such integration of Tongan and American identities is possible

37. For those who lack the ability to speak the Tongan language, do you think it is the parents' responsibility and or obligations to teach their children how to speak Tongan?

- a. Yes

- b. Learning Tongan is not essential for Tongan-Americans
  - c. I think it best to leave the Tongan language behind
- 

38. Aside from parents inability to teach their children to speak Tongan, do you think that recent generations feel less motivated to learn their language? Why or why not?

- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

39. Do you agree with the way Tongan families choose to discipline their children, or do the American values you may identify with go against the traditional ways of discipline?

- a. I agree with Tongan ways of discipline
  - b. I think that Tongan ways of discipline are outdated and a part of the past
  - c. I am confused about this matter
- 

40. Do you feel parents of second generation kids find it difficult to “maintain control” of their children?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. First generation parents of second generation youth should have give and take about discipline, given the difficulties with American culture

41. As second generation children we tend to take only what we want or think we need from parents teachings, and apply what we take to the American ways of life to create a “new” kind of standard. Do you feel that we are neglecting our Tongan traditions by taking only certain pieces and applying it to how we live our lives?

- a. No, we have to compromise in order to get along
- b. Yes, we are neglecting our heritage and should not be trying to fit into American culture
- c. I have given up on following Tongan ways

42. Considering your understanding of the Bible and Tongan traditions, how do these affect your views on view on sexuality and interpersonal relationships?

- a. My views on sexuality and interpersonal relationships are greatly influenced by biblical and Tongan teachings
- b. My views on sexuality and interpersonal relationships are moderately affected by biblical and Tongan teachings

c. My views on sexuality and interpersonal relationships are not at all affected by biblical or Tongan teachings, since I consider these out of date

43. How can you balance Tongan values with American values in order to ensure that both concepts are met?

- a. I attend church, try to absorb Tongan culture to compare with what the American culture seems to promote, and then think for myself
- b. I do not balance Tongan and American values very well: I give in more to American culture
- c. I have given up on balancing them, and just live life as it comes

44. How comfortable do you feel voicing your opinions amongst other Tongans in the church community?

- a. Very
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

45. Do you feel as though the false humility that is common within the Tongan culture limits the amount of opinion that can be offered?

- a. Yes, because it seems to stifle honest opinion
- b. No, because even seemingly humble people find a way to get heard
- c. Sometimes it is limiting, and when it is, people need to talk about it

46. False humility, associated with Tongan culture, needs to be balanced with having a voice in decisions

- a. I agree
- b. I disagree
- c. I don't think false humility among Tongans is a big problem

### **Religious Factor questions**

47. What do you like about the Tongan church?

- a. Music
- b. Feasting, fellowship, and treating others well
- c. Preaching, serving others as disciples

48. What do you dislike about the Tongan church?

- a. Language
- b. Length of service, music, sound teaching of the bible
- c. How they demonstrate the Gospel

Further explanation \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

49. What does the church mean to you?

- a. A sacred place for people
- b. Time together with other believers
- c. Expressing faith as a follower of God the Creator and Jesus Christ

Further Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

50. Do you think it is important for the church to sponsor Tongan cultural activities?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Somewhat (explain):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

51. What changes would you make in the Tongan worship service? (music, language, media?)

- a. Music
- b. Language
- c. Media
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

52. If you attend church, do you feel you have opportunities for influential leadership in the Tongan church?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Sometimes

53. If you have never attended church, or have stopped attending, what would bring you back?

- a. Relationship outreach, home visitation
- b. Activities
- c. Family

54. Are you interested in the Bible and its use as a guide for your life?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Sometimes

55. Do you have problems with the teachings in the Bible? (Contradicts itself, teachings about being gay, endorsement of violence, discrimination against women)

- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Sometimes
- Other (explain):

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56. Do you see a conflict between what Christians say they believe and the bad things they sometimes do?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Human nature is a tension of good and evil; people should be given a break

57. Do you yearn for a close relationship with God and/or Christ?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

Further Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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58. How should the church best approach communicating the faith to younger persons without judging them or turning them off?

- a. Listen to the youth in order to understand their struggle to acquire faith and use it for guidance
- b. Allow them to have a voice in the church
- c. Allow them to have a position of leadership in church

Further comments \_\_\_\_\_

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59. Do you believe there are evident differences between customary biblical witnesses and our Tongan norms that have been added by the Tongan church?

- a. Yes, there are differences
- b. No, there are no differences

c. Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

60. Which of our Tongan norms have been added to church settings that differentiate us from the biblical witness?

- a. Our cultural attire (Kiekie, puletaha, tupenu)
- b. Social activities (Faikava, kalasi aho, etc.)
- c. Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

61. Do you believe that the elders have the right to silence our youth and or young adults when determining the future of the church?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Yes, on some important matters

Explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

62. Contrary to the current practice of deferring to elders, and given that the youth are the future leaders of the church, do you think that there should be more responsible young adults in leadership positions in the church?

- a. Yes, because how are the youth to learn if they never have experience.
- b. Yes, because as youth and young adults, we have innovative ideas and are more acquainted with shifting generations.
- c. No, because we are Tongan, we must abide by traditions and respect the decisions made by elders, regardless of how they contradict our way of life and thinking.

63. Do you believe the church takes enough moral initiative?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not look to the church for moral guidance

64. Do you believe that our Tongan church upholds its moral teachings? Do we tend to use culture as an excuse from cultivating to customary American biblical teachings?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Sometimes

Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

65. Do you think it is important for both youths and older members to create opportunities for better communication?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. It is useless to try

66. How can younger people persuade the older generations to allow them the opportunities to be outspoken to a certain extent ?

- a. Prove to the elders that we are capable of leadership tasks
- b. Learn the benefits of both perspectives (Not only one perspective is right)
- c. Both of the above

Further Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

67. How can we include youth more in real planning for and conducting worship and programs?

- a. Set aside a time for youth involvement within the worship service, programs, and meetings
  - b. Allow youth opinion in plans and programs
  - c. Both of the above
- (Explain): \_\_\_\_\_

68. What deters you from actively participating more in church?

- a. Limited in time
- b. The language barrier
- c. I find the church irrelevant to how I want to live my life

69. What are ways we can improve our church community, so that youth seek interest in the church?

- a. Show loving hospitality to everyone, of all ages
- b. Be more flexible about rules for living – lighten up!
- c. Be more serious about spiritual formation and exciting ways to interpret the Gospel

70. Considering such diversity within the youth culture, do you think that our church should integrate more of the youth culture into church lifestyle? (This includes dances, music, technology, etc.)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Some (Please List): \_\_\_\_\_

71. Would it be beneficial to create small groups for youths to have a place to talk about their problems, seek advice in a less controversial environment, or to just celebrate their joys and accomplishments?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't look to the church to provide these: I find them in other places

72. Should we abide by the standard guidelines and traditions of the church?

- a. Yes, because that is what we are most common with. The standard guidelines are what differentiate us from other religions.
- b. No, change is always a good thing and keeps members interested and active in social events and church activities.
- c. I'm not sure.

73. How can we encourage youth to attend church and pursue a spiritual discipline as a common practice?

- a. Increase youth involvement during church services.
- b. Create spiritual groups for youth to interact with the bible and deepen their faith.
- c. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

74. Do you view church as a social "club" or as a spiritual home?

- a. Social club
- b. Spiritual home
- c. Both a spiritual home and an a social meeting place

75. As a church, it is important that youth understand the concept of church as a loving and accepting fellowship and spiritual home. What are ways we can interact with youths so that they feel spiritually motivated to attend church rather than viewing church as a social meeting place?

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76. One of the most evident reason youths lose interest in the church is because of their idea that their elders are unwilling or unable to face their hypocrisy. Do you share this idea, and can you suggest ways the elders might come to terms with their insincerity and really be available to youth to share first hand the experience they have had with God's miracles and teachings?

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