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Nurturing agency in emerging adults of local churches: a case study from Soshanguve

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Emerging adults (age 35 and below) are the majority of the African population. In South Africa, for example, emerging adults make 63.9% of its population. This age group seems to be marginalised in Christian congregations of the township of Soshanguve where this research was conducted. This research is a case study that interviewed 30 de-churched emerging adults from different denominations to make its conclusions. It is stressing how the church could see the emerging adults' empowerment as its contribution to building an inclusive society. It was found out that many people under the age of 35 years are leaving their local churches because they feel that their voices are undervalued, and they do not have fulfilling roles to play. It was concluded that some de-churched emerging adults are eager to exercise their agency in making their voices heard and playing fulfilling roles in a missional community structure outside their previous congregations. Many others just complained about the marginalisation they experienced in their previous congregations, but they did not exercise their agency to help build a church they would love to be part of. Marginalisation could, therefore, be an opportunity to create an inclusive community. It could also remain an eternal wound for other people who may just be finger-pointing perpetrators of marginalisation without demonstrating a different praxis.

Contribution: This is a practical theology article that is strengthened by sources from political sciences and development studies to stress the need for the church to model inter-generational inclusiveness in how it operates.

Keywords: agency; emerging adults; inclusiveness; local church; marginalisation.

Introduction

The majority of Africans are below the age of 35 years (yalisouthernafrica.melimu.com 2019). In South Africa alone, '63.9% of the population is aged 34 years and younger' (R. Maluleka, ([702 Talk Radio]) pers. comm., 12 September 2019). In the township of Soshanguve where this research was conducted, '68.9% of the population is below the age of 34' (STATSSA 2022). The largest age bracket is '20–24 years of age with 12.2% of the total population' of the township (STATSSA 2022). Yet Christians under the age of 35 years seem to be marginalised in congregations located in the township of Soshanguve because of their experience in life. It seems like little experience is equated to a lack of wisdom and knowledge of how to do things. Therefore, people with little experience such as the emerging adults are constantly pushed away to the periphery of local churches. It can be argued that the emerging adults 'occupy a traditional marginal position' in local churches (Klaasen 2018:1). Senior and middle-aged citizens seem to be the age groups that are mostly trusted to lead local churches into the future they would like to become. These age groups seem to be the 'centre' of local churches in terms of decision-making and the shaping of worship services (Klaasen 2018:1). This reality causes a 'divide between decision-makers at the centre and the [*emerging adults*] at the margins' (Klaasen 2018:1). This culture found in local churches is marginalising towards a certain age group and mirrors 'the South African society at large' (Beukes and Van der Westhuizen 2018:1). African societies are known to be 'hierarchical and patriarchal' (Maathai 2009:31). They tend to see older men as wise and leaders. At the same time, they marginalise women and the emerging adults (Maathai 2009:32). Many local churches in the community of Soshanguve seem to be a sample of this portrayal of African society.

The researcher lives and serves as a missionary in the township of Soshanguve. He has been living there since 2008. He has had the opportunity to frequently visit 10 congregations from different denominations where he observed marginalising systems against emerging adults. In these

congregations, there is a constant exodus of emergent adults out of congregations. Marginalising behaviours are a contradiction to the church mandate to 'be a messenger of justice in society' (Van Niekerk 2015:1). One of the signs of justice could be to be inclusive and create shalom communities. A shalom community is 'an environment where socio-economic justice is available to all and community's problems and their resolve is a concern for all' (Linthicum 2003:38). Justice is something the church is expected to advocate for in society and should be known for because justice leads to 'peace and reconciliation in society' and 'the maintenance of right relationships between persons within a community' (Kabongo 2021:2). Therefore, the church is expected to treat everybody justly regardless of their age group.

Emerging adults could benefit from being treated fairly because they are capable of contributing to creating shalom communities around them. Emergent adults have 'the potential to act as key agents of social change, economic expansion and innovation' (Beukes and Van der Westhuizen 2018:1). This article is therefore asking: how can the church see the emerging adults' empowerment as its contribution to building an inclusive society we would like to become? This study was designed from insights gained from people between the ages of 20 and 30 years. Hence its emphasis on emerging adults who fall under this age bracket. InnerCHANGE, the mission organisation the researcher serves under, focuses on building relationships that could lead to discipleship with people in local communities outside the walls of congregations. InnerCHANGE (2022):

> Envisions movements of fresh, authentic expressions of the church [...] Holistic in nature, working for community transformation, pioneered by Godly leaders, fired by a passion for their neighbo[u]rs, compelled to multiply disciples of Jesus among people facing poverty, so that the name of Jesus Christ is renowned among the nations.

It is through these efforts of reaching out to people outside local churches that this mission organisation raises capacity for mission and community development. The youth constitutes the biggest percentage of this capacity. The researcher met all the research participants in places such as sports grounds, fitness centres and community functions (funerals, weddings and tombstone unveiling events). All the research participants grew up going to church with their families; hence, they are called de-churched. The latter concept is usually referred to people who once were members of a local church and left it. These people are usually still followers of Jesus but do not belong to a fellowship of believers. All the research participants fall into that category.

The researcher pursued this research project as a platform to continue his learning of what it means to be a relevant catalyst of expressions of the body of Christ outside recognised church institutions. He has some experience in starting expressions of the church on sports grounds and homes.

He continues to learn how to do that well from his few successes and many failures. The data collected from interacting with these research participants led to the recommendations this article makes.

Methodology

This study is a case study that investigates local churches, on the issue of the marginalisation of emerging adults. Purposeful sampling within the 'chain referral sampling method' was employed to recruit participants (Gill 2020:89). The researcher looked for research participants from diverse denominational backgrounds. The research participants came from 17 different local churches. These local churches can be grouped into 12 denominations: African Independent, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Dutch Reformed, Free Reformed, United Reformed Church of South Africa, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Zion Christian and Twelve Apostles. The researcher personally knew 10 of the research participants. These 10 recruited 2 people each to be interviewed. The age group of the research participants is 20–30 years. They were 15 men and 15 women. In his planning, the researcher was looking to interview people between the ages of 18 and 34 years. It just randomly happened that all the research participants were between the ages of 20 and 30 years. None of them was below the age of 20 years or above the age of 31 years. There was a possibility of recruiting more research participants, but the existing ones gave consistent themes that the possibility of acquiring new knowledge seemed minimal. Structured interviews were conducted over 18 months. The researcher has visited on many occasions 10 congregations of Soshanguve. In those visits, he found the emerging adults as a minority group in those congregations. He thought that interacting with emerging adults from different genders and denominational backgrounds could help him answer his research question.

The researcher gathered his data after concluding all the interviews. He 'read through everything and coded' it (Ngulube 2015:6–13). This process helped him identify the main themes that came to the fore. These themes will make sense within the contextual understanding of the township of Soshanguve.

Contextual understanding of Soshanguve

Soshanguve is a township located approximately 35 km north of the city of Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa. The township is a word that is formed from parts of the words for the following languages: Sotho, Shangaan, Nguni and Venda. It was originally called Mabopane east. It was renamed Soshanguve in 1977 when its counterpart, Mabopane west, was renamed Mabopane and incorporated into the then-newly established Bantustan of Bophuthatswana (STATSSA 2022).

The diversity of cultures within Soshanguve seems to mirror the diversity of denominations found in that township. This is why it was important to interview people from diverse

denominational backgrounds to interact objectively with the collected data.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research. All the research participants had to sign a consent letter to acknowledge their willingness to participate in this research. The consent form described the nature and aim of the study. It also included the participants' rights to privacy (hence this research does not use names), voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Interview findings

All the research participants were asked two questions: Why are not you a member of a local church anymore? And what could make you go back to a local church? The answers to these questions helped to form the sub-headings of this section. After the coding process, two themes came out of the interviews. They are undervalued voices and no fulfilling roles.

Undervalued voice

The majority of the respondents (17 people) said that they stopped going to church when they realised that their parents and other adults' opinions mattered more than people under the age of 35 years although they were the majority of their congregation.

Two research participants from the same congregation, said the youth committee suggested that their youth weekly prayer time be moved from Sunday 09:00 to Saturday afternoon. This suggestion was subjected to the discernment of the Holy Spirit by the church leadership team. It was only approved a year later when an elder (a senior citizen) repeated the same suggestion. That seemed to be a noticed pattern: a repeated suggestion an older person made was enough to approve it.

Some research participants mentioned that, in church meetings, the voices of the emergent adults were often cut off as they were sharing something. According to them, to cut someone off in a meeting is unacceptable behaviour in the culture. However, it seemed to be acceptable when an older person did it to someone younger.

Other research participants said that they learned to share their ideas about the church with their parents at home, mostly their mothers. They learned to persuade their parents about some ideas and then, encouraged the parents to share with the church while they keep quiet. They saw their ideas implemented that way.

Some research participants felt hurt to regularly be told that they did not understand some matters because they were young and inexperienced when they asked questions or questioned some practices.

Some research participants were told to learn to listen to voices of wisdom (those of seniors in the congregation) until they get to a certain age (from middle age) when their contributions to conversations will be acknowledged.

Some research participants left because the church dress code was prescribed, and they were uncomfortable with it. They wore what was comfortable to them and were labelled as rebellious. Sometimes they were not allowed to get into the church building because of their non-compliance with the church dress code. According to them, a lot of preaching was done on the pulpit by pastors and elders (all from middle age and senior citizens' age brackets) about 'godly dress code' when coming to church. They never saw any wisdom behind such preaching.

Aziz (2020:1) shares this sentiment of feeling his voice undervalued as a young person as he reflects on his upbringing in a South African township where 'leadership and areas of influence are often reserved for the adult in the community'. In that environment, emergent adults are not regarded as capable competent leaders because of their lack of experience. Such a mindset jeopardises the future of the church because it does not think highly of the most active and energetic section of its members. It seems like in many local churches of Soshanguve, emergent adults are perceived as 'not having the maturity or capacity for theological reflection' (Weber 2017:5). Emergent adults are still seen as a section of the population that still has a lot to learn and should be slow to voicing out their opinion. This is true and could be said about any generation because there is no human being who is a 'know-it-all'. Emergent adults seem to not be seen as capable of theologising. It could be helpful to deconstruct a general understanding of who is capable of theologising. A good starting point could be to understand theology as 'a reflection on God's activities with humanity' (p. 5). Emergent adults are capable of such a reflection and can contribute to the building of the church and society in general.

Emergent adults have the potential to 'make a significant impact if they are treated as an asset, in the process of working towards growth and the creation of opportunities' (Mills 2019:4). They are the section of a population that can easily influence the course of things positively, if 'given the attention they deserve' (Bunge 2016:93). Such attention would equip them with the necessary skills to reach their potential. They have the numbers with them to be influencers in local churches as well as the society at large. The undermining of this potential makes the middle and senior citizens overconfidently believe that they are irreplaceable. Therefore, many of them overstay their welcome in their leadership responsibility. The reality of the current African political leadership speaks for itself. The majority of these 'leaders are over 55 years old with several leaders over 75 years old' (Gandhi 2019:1). This contrasts sharply with 'the continent's very young population at a median age of 20 years old' (Gandhi 2019:1). While experience could be argued as the reason behind the African leadership age group, a

counterargument could also be put forward that experience has not served Africa well in the post-colonial era. Kataliko ([1999] 2001:3) thinks that the post-colonial African leaders 'exploit' Africa and their fellow citizens worse than the colonisers. Additionally, they:

> [M]isappropriate taxes which would have served to improve the quality of life of their fellow citizens and charge excessive taxes which do not only hurt big businesses but also small businesses such as street hawkers. (p. 3)

This is why 'many African countries are still characterised by poverty and dysfunction' (Maathai 2009:26). The majority of the people who are at the forefront of the post-independent African underdevelopment are not the youth. The church needs to prepare the youth to 'understand their personal and public responsibility' in making sure they participate in shaping those institutions and in developing their continent starting from their local communities (Nel 2018:206). Such preparation could help emergent adults 'make a transformative contribution' to all generations around it (Aziz 2022:3). Emergent adults would interact with all these generations in a way that is mutually beneficial and would generate creative tension. Creative tension can be defined as a 'result of the interrelatedness and connectedness of ministry as a complex system' (Cloete 2015:2). Creative tension is healthy because 'people are created to walk alongside others' so that they can create a communal desirable environment (Klaasen 2018:3).

The 17 respondents see the ideal church as a space where uniqueness should be acknowledged and valued. They also see it as an institution that should focus on and prioritise showing people how to follow Jesus above anything else. They would consider joining such a church.

Another reason why the emergent adults interviewed left local churches had to do with their roles.

No fulfilling role

The minority group (13 people) of research participants said that they left their local churches because they did not have a fulfilling role to play. As emergent adults, they were expected to either be part of the choir, the ushering team or an assistant to the Sunday school teacher. Additionally, all these areas of service had to be led by a middle or senior citizen. Any other suggestions about the roles emergent adults could play such as running an art club, sometimes running the worship service, running sports activities or a suggestion to prioritise the church budget differently were not welcomed.

Some of the research participants said, for instance, that they were already involved in playing soccer in their local communities and schools. They wanted to start teams in their congregations because some congregations play against one another as a way to fellowship. This suggestion was rejected because it was seen as a way to get distracted from focusing on spiritual things. Also, such an initiative was going to drain the church's finances.

Some research participants mentioned that they were part of a local community choir and loved their experience. They suggested having such at their congregations, but the idea was rejected because it was not part of the church tradition to have emergent adults lead a choir.

One research participant mentioned that he was part of a drama club at a local non-profit organisation. He suggested helping with the rehearsal of Christmas and Easter dramas, which were part of his congregation tradition. His suggestion was approved on the condition that he works under the supervision of some senior members who had limited knowledge about acting.

One research participant said that she suggested starting a community garden in the churchyard, which was very spacious. The congregation only used a quarter of that space. Her idea was rejected because some community members who were going to be involved in the project were non-Christians and were going to bring demons into the churchyard.

It can be argued that one of the ways to nurture some sense of agency in emergent adults is, to create space for them to contribute to 'the shaping of a structure' such as a local church (Lavender 2015:1). Emergent adults have the potential to 'recreate their society through their participation in family, work, culture and ritual' (p. 4). They have the potential to be 'constructive' (Honwana & De Boeck 2005:3). Involving them could be a way to build their 'confidence' (Lavender 2015:9). Emergent adults should be developed into 'active agents' in their understanding of God and the role God wants them to play in their local churches and the society around them (Weber 2017:5). It is, therefore, critical to be intentional about creating 'safe places in which' the youth could ask questions about their faith morality and identity (p. 10). It is equally critical to create space where they could experiment with their ideas, make mistakes and learn from them and reflect on the actions they took.

These 13 research participants said that they long to be part of a church that would allow them to be proactive participants. That is also the kind of church they would go back to, in case their former congregations create a platform of inter-generational participation in the building of the church. They long to see local churches that are considerate of the opinions of all its members regardless of their age group. Grobbelaar (2016) argues that the involvement of emergent adults 'in the leadership and service of the church minimises the risk of them leaving the church… it creates a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves…' (p. 46). When someone feels that they belong to a certain group they will most likely stay and contribute to shaping the group into something that benefits all its members.

Reflection

This article stresses about what it means to remain a follower of Jesus outside a local congregation. The fact that all the

research participants were met outside the walls of local churches may be an opportunity to envision movements of fresh, authentic expressions of the church that are inclusive generationally and could involve the research participants as wounded healers – advocates of inclusiveness in the body of Christ. These research participants could use their experience of marginalisation to creatively commit to being inclusive.

Marginalisation and the church are meant to be on opposite sides because the church is supposed to be known for its prophetic witnessing of justice – the opposite of marginalisation – in society. It is meant to be seen interacting with societal challenges such as injustice so that 'new futures can be believed in' hoped for and tasted by everyone (Brueggemann 2001:116–117). Such a taste could generate some hope in calling 'into question' the unjust normal and pave the way for the future society we would like to become (Brueggemann 2001:65). The prophetic witnessing of the church is imperative in places like Soshanguve because as Christians, 'God will hold us accountable for our humanity as much as for our Christianity' (Wright 2010:49). Our humanity would be accessed by our promotion of justice.

This is in sharp contrast to the post-Second World War era where emergent adults 'were held up as the future of many African societies' (Burgess 2005:xv). They were considered as having 'an important role in building prosperous new societies newly freed from the chains of colonialism' (Burgess 2005:xv). They were opportunities:

> [F]or young people to both challenge existing power structures and to develop their own visions for the future. This role was often encouraged by the nationalist leaders of the time who saw a need to generate a powerful sense of community and shared destiny among their populations. (Lavender 2015:3)

Political leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, 'saw the need to harness the creative energies of young people as part of their new plans for economic, political and social transformation' (Lavender 2015:3). However, this is an ideal that never materialised. The researcher was inspired by this historical fact and Mark 1:16–18 where Jesus invited fishermen to follow him and promised to develop them into fishers of people. He invited the research participants to consider signing up for a yearlong apprenticeship the organisation he belongs to runs for local community emergent leaders. This apprenticeship goal is 'to develop servant leaders who [can] help flourish a community' (Kabongo 2019:5). It uses 'the Bible and practical ministry projects as [its] formation tools' (Kabongo 2019:5). This apprenticeship has been running yearly since 2016. Only 13 people of the 30 research participants joined this apprenticeship. They are learning from doing what it means to be missional leaders in the context they grew up in. All the apprentices are tasked to form discipleship groups. Discipleship groups are a symbiosis between bible studies and life skills teaching. They intend to develop followers of Jesus who are tangible assets to their contexts. Their goal is to develop love agents. Love agents are followers of Jesus who seek the peace and prosperity of their contexts in tangible ways and invite other people to do the same so that quality of life can be improved, lives can flourish and communities can be built from the inside out. Love agents are intentional about multiplying and therefore prioritise disciple making. Many apprentices have been able to form discipleship groups. Few of them have struggled to do so. These discipleship groups have been a positive taste of what the researcher envisions as fresh and relevant expressions of obedient followership of Jesus. It is encouraging to see some emergent adults step up as assets in the building up of their local communities.

One research participant runs a beadworks group that includes senior citizens and the youth. Another one coaches a soccer team of under 13 years old. He meets once a month with the players' parents/guardians who are in the age bracket of youth, middle age and senior to encourage and challenge them to be involved in their children's life. Some research participants are involved in kids' and teenager mentoring clubs. They get to not only interact weekly with those they serve. They also interact with their parents/guardians (seniors, middle agers and youth) quarterly to try and build a functional support structure for the children and teenagers they serve.

The church should strategically 'identify' emergent adults as an asset for the now and future (Baron 2017:7). Emergent adults are 'capable of assuming positions of leaders and have much to offer to the church and society…' (Aziz 2020:1). They need to be 'fully respected as persons, valued as gifts, and viewed as agents' (Bunge 2016:101).

The church in the context such as Soshanguve should prioritise developing youth people as disciples of Jesus who continue to make other disciples (Nel 2015b). This discipleship focus should not be limited to 'live one's life to glorify God' (Beukes and Van der Westhuizen 2018:8). It should help the youth 'to celebrate inclusion, celebrate learning how to live life and celebrate developing (however, challenging) a sensitivity to choose what matters most in life' (Baron 2017:4). Such discipleship could have a positive impact on the church as well as the society at large. The gospel is defined as good news because it is meant to be 'the love of God made visible' (Perkins 1993:44). The above-mentioned understanding of discipleship empowers the emergent adults to be a conduit of love and care in our society so desperately needs.

It is unquestionable that emergent adults still need to be developed in many areas, including how to be faithful disciples of Jesus. The middle-aged and senior citizen Christians could be the experience, knowledge and wisdom the emergent adults could run to. A good relationship between all the age groups in the church could help reach this goal of faithful discipleship. Malan Nel (2015b:2) argues that the most biblically advised way to develop disciples is 'through relationships'. Additionally, disciples need to receive 'personal attention' in order for them to learn how to live sacrificially like the Bible requires (Nel 2015b:2). Such attention could nurture 'self-initiating, reproducing and fully

devoted followers of Jesus Christ' (Ogden 2003:54). These attributes are often cultivated when followers of Jesus are 'involved in highly accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ' (p. 54). Such maturity is seen when someone shows 'with integrity [*their*] belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God if we ask ourselves what it means to be Christ's people in the world today. The answer to that question defines the quality of our discipleship, and when church members take it seriously, the church will truly become a servant church (Nel 2015b:2).

The other 17 research participants wanted things to change at their previous local churches so that they can return to those faith communities. They chose not to exercise their agency in helping to design the church they desire to be part of. Joining our apprentices could have been a way to explore that. They are still de-churched and still speak bitterly about their church experience as emergent adults.

The researcher stresses that a role of the body of Christ could be to 'empower' emergent adults to take responsibility in the shaping of structures they belong to 'and to practice caring for others' in their local communities (Flint, Atkinson & Kearns 2002:7). Complaining about marginalisation at local churches should be seen as a step towards exploring our agency about being the change we would like to see around us. Sometimes, to be that change, someone may need to change his or her environment. Hence, joining the apprenticeship was an alternative among many others. This apprenticeship stresses the fact that emergent adults are 'valued members of the faith community now' (Cloete 2015:1). Their 'lived experiences and contextual challenges and needs' should be integrated into their discipleship (Beukes & Van der Westhuizen 2018:2). For example, the emergent adults may find issues of 'climate change' as an important theological matter to be put in the agenda of their witnessing as Christians (Zagidulin 2020:1). It could also challenge the church of communities such as Soshanguve to broaden their scope of focus to matters of common good such as climate change. Many Christian communities in that township seem to limit their scope of focus to the spiritual mandate of the church. They tend to see matters of public interest or common good as 'either a secondary task or not part of the church's mission' (Kabongo 2019b:1). The emergent adults' general curiosity about different socio-economic-political matters could challenge the church to become a proactive role player in engaging 'the dizzying social change' happening in its context (Kabongo 2019b:1). Such an engagement could help the church exercise its public mandate. Such a mandate would mean the church will prepare and support its 'members for vocation and witness in a pluralistic society' (Fowler 1991:155).

Such a direction would pave the way for a needed and relevant missional church in a context such as Soshanguve. A missional church has the potential to bring the emergent adults to the centre. It would consider 'the culture or subculture of the [*emergent adults*] and accepts that [*the emergent adults are*] a definitive stage in the lifespan of people' (Klaasen 2018:4). It will 'encompass the [*emergent adults*], and the uniqueness of the [*emergent adults*] must form part of the ministerial formation processes' (Klaasen 2018:4). The missional church values being a tangible representation of the good news of the gospel in local communities. Its involvement in local communities is 'never for the community's sake', but to bring transformation that is relatable, tangible and transferable (Clark 2001:81). The emergent adults' energy and closeness to subcultures of local communities could propel the church to a meaningful missional posture. Weber (2017) stresses that:

[*T*]he church was never meant to be a building or some form of an institution ... [*but*] a person in a community with others who share the same confession in Jesus Christ. (p. 6)

And live in a way that is inviting so that multiplication can happen. An inviting way could be to constructively engage in societal matters. Therefore, the emergent adults need:

[*T*]o be able to live out and experience their identity in Christ alongside morally engaging in society and growing in their faith … There is a need for engagement with [*the emergent adults*] around issues related to their country's histories; their familial or tribal positions within those histories and also social justice around issues that impact their faith daily. (Weber 2017:8)

The missional approach to being the church could challenge the middle age and senior citizen members of the church to move away from their current messiah complex. Kelsey (2017:155) understands a messiah complex as 'a state of mind in which an individual holds a belief that they are the only person capable of assisting others'. In this instance, some generations may think that they have the monopoly of wisdom to assist the younger generations. The reality is that each generation has something to bring to the table of interaction that the other generation can benefit from. The church should harness 'the unique calling of each generation-each having unique gifts, the strength of vision, leadership capacity, and life experience' that could build the body of Christ (Rodemann & Awuku 2020:11). Such a posture would be a tangible way to live out its calling 'to promote an inclusive society where all the generations matter' (Kabongo 2020:84).

The church needs to demonstrate its commitment to the biblical principle of justice by 'demonstrating' that the voices of all its members' matter (Kabongo 2020:84). Pillay (2017:2) points out that 'the world is not so much interested in what we believe today but in what the church is doing to transform society so that justice and peace may prevail'. A generationally inclusive church could be a tangible sign of justice our society needs and could see tangibly lived out. Such a church could be missional. Reggie Nel (2015a:3) argues that 'being missional is to understand a little of Jesus' inclusive thinking'.

Conclusion

This article reflected on the ongoing challenge many Soshanguve congregations face seeing significant numbers of

emergent adults leave their ranks. This article identified from interviews conducted with 30 research participants that the feeling of the emergent adults voices being undervalued and them not having fulfilling roles within their congregations are the reasons why they left their local churches. These reasons may just be some among many others; exposing the church that is marginalising emergent adults. This is also the church that is mirroring the marginalisation the emergent adults' experiences in the society around them where middle-aged and senior citizens are perceived as the only voice of wisdom, especially when they are male. This is contrary to the prophetic witnessing the church is meant to be known for. Local churches should interact with these reasons and attempt to be empowering by being inclusive of all the voices of their members. The church is meant to be a prophetic witness to an African society that is known for its marginalisation of the youth. The researcher presented a pathway for the research participants to lead and have roles that suit their giftings through a yearlong apprenticeship the mission organisation he belongs to runs. Only a minority made use of it. This shows that the people who complain do not always have the willingness to be the change they would love to see around them.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article. The data collected through interviews are confidential information available to the author alone.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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