

**Rethinking the Role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in Faith  
Formation of Young People within a Networking Society: A Case  
of Kaunda Square Congregation in Lusaka District.**

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By

**Michael Lungu**

Student ID: 2400197

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Supervisor: Dr. Ronelle Sonnenberg

Assessor: Dr. Marten van der Meulen

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**Abbreviation**

CYF	Christian Youth Fellowship
RCZ	Reformed Church in Zambia

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# Table of Contents

<b>DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>DECLARATION OF CONSENT .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abbreviation.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b><i>Abstract</i>.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Research Background.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Research problem .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.3 Research questions.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>1.3.1 Main research question</i> .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>1.3.2 Sub-Questions</i> .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.4 Research Objectives.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.5 Purpose of the study.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>1.5.1 Ecclesial Relevance</i> .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>1.5.2 Educational Relevance</i>.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>1.5.3 Academic Relevance</i> .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.7 Operational Definition of Terms .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.8 Research structure .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2 Relational Dynamics in Youth Faith Formation .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.3 Youth Culture and its Impact on Faith Formation.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.4 Digital Networks and Faith Formation .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.5 The Role of the Church in Faith Formation.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.6 Challenges and Opportunities in Youth Faith Formation .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b><i>2.6.1 Challenges in Faith Formation Structures</i> .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b><i>2.6.2 Emerging Opportunities for Holistic Faith Formation</i> .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.7 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.2 Theological and Methodological Orientation .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.3 Research Design .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>3.3.1 Gatekeeper</i> .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>3.3.2 Selection of Participants</i> .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>3.3.3 Target Population</i> .....</b>	<b>18</b>

3.3.4 Sample Size.....	18
3.3.5 Sampling Techniques.....	18
3.3.6 Relationship Between Theory and Empirical Data .....	18
3.3.7 Research Instruments .....	19
3.4 Data Collection Procedures.....	19
3.4.1 Digital Observations .....	20
3.4.2 Reflections on the Pilot Study.....	20
3.4.3 Data Analysis.....	20
3.5 Trustworthiness and Validity .....	21
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	21
3.7 Conclusion .....	21
<b>CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>23</b>
4. 1 Introduction.....	23
4.2 Use of Participant Quotations.....	23
4.3 Thematic Analysis Process .....	23
4.3.1 Phase One: Familiarisation with the Data .....	24
4.3.2 Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes .....	24
4.3.3 Phase Three: Searching for Themes .....	24
4.3.4 Phase Four: Reviewing Themes .....	24
4.3.5 Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes .....	24
4.3.6 Phase Six: Producing the Report .....	25
4.4 Findings.....	25
4.4.1 Spiritual Growth: Understanding and Stages of Faith Formation .....	25
4.4.2 Technology and Spiritual Connection.....	27
4.4.3 Youth as Theological Agents .....	29
4.4.4 Opportunities and Challenges in a Network Society .....	31
4.4.5 Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation in the Church .....	32
4.5 Summary of Findings .....	34
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	37
5.2 A Missiological Potential for Global and Local Faith Formation .....	37
5.2.1 Global Missiological Potential.....	38
5.2.2 Local Missiological Potential .....	39
5.3 Youth as Theological Agents: Child Theology and Contextual Theology in Practice .....	40
5.4 The Need for Fragments, but Also the Danger of Fragments: Challenges and Opportunities .....	42

<i>5.4.1 The Opportunities: Access, Flexibility, and Digital Agency</i> .....	43
<i>5.4.2 The Dangers: Distraction and Disorientation.</i> .....	43
<b>5.5 Evaluating Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation in the Church: An Ecclesial Task Perspective</b> .....	44
<b>5.6 Summary</b> .....	46
<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	47
<b>6.1 Introduction</b> .....	47
<b>6.2 Summary of Key Findings</b> .....	47
<b>6.3 Theological and Missiological Implications</b> .....	48
<b>6.4 Contributions to Knowledge and Practice</b> .....	49
<b>6.5 Recommendations</b> .....	49
<b>6.5.1 Reformulating the Ecclesial Task of Faith Formation in the RCZ</b> .....	49
<b>6.5 For Further Research</b> .....	50
<b>6.5.1 Develop a Missiological Theology of Technology</b> .....	50
<b>6.5.2 Deepen Exploration of Youth as Theological Agents in the RCZ</b> .....	51
<b>6.6 Reflection on the Research Process</b> .....	51
<b>6.7 Limitations of the Study</b> .....	51
<b>6.7.1 Contextual Scope</b> .....	52
<b>6.7.2 Sample Size and Diversity</b> .....	52
<b>6.7.3 Researcher Positionality</b> .....	52
<b>6.7.4 Remote and Online Data Collection</b> .....	52
<b>6.7.5 Language and Translation Nuances</b> .....	52
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	53
<b>Appendix A: Participants Statement Consent Form</b> .....	58
<b>Appendix B: Focus Group / Interview Questions</b> .....	60
<b>Appendix C: / Interview Questions for Church Leaders</b> .....	61
<b>Appendix D: Data Management Plan</b> .....	62

### ***Abstract***

This study explores the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ) in the faith formation of young people within the context of a networking society. Traditional methods such as catechism, Sunday school, and youth fellowship, while historically significant, are increasingly challenged by the rise of digital technologies and online communities that reshape how young people engage with spirituality. Using Kaunda Square Congregation in Lusaka as a case study, the research employs a qualitative, practical theological approach, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and digital observations, to examine how youth experience faith formation and how church leaders respond to these developing realities. Thematic analysis revealed five core themes: spiritual growth, technology and spiritual connection, youth as theological agents, the opportunities and challenges of a network society, and the value and limitations of traditional ecclesial practices. The findings highlight that young people actively seek relational, contextual, and participatory models of discipleship, often extending beyond formal church structures. The study contributes to missiological and practical theological discourse by offering recommendations for how the RCZ can reformulate its ecclesial task to remain faithful to its confessional heritage while responding to the networking realities of a new generation.

**Keywords:** Role, Faith Formation, Young People, Reformed Church in Zambia, Networking Society.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Research Background**

The faith formation of young people in a networking society has been the subject of extensive research, particularly in religious education, theology, and digital studies. Scholars have examined how digital technology and social media are reshaping religious engagement and posing challenges for traditional church institutions.

While various studies have explored faith formation in institutional settings over time, there has been limited research on how the Reformed Church in Zambia can enhance its approach in a network society. The increasing reliance on networking platforms raises concerns about the effectiveness of traditional church programs such as catechism and youth fellowship. Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, (2017:9-11) notes that networking is becoming an integral part of human life, calling for a shift in how church leaders engage with faith formation.

This study bridges the gap by examining how the RCZ can rework its ecclesial task to sustain meaningful faith formation for young people in the networking society.

### **1.2 Research problem**

The Reformed Church in Zambia faces challenges in the faith formation of young people through traditional methods like catechism, Sunday school, and youth fellowship meetings. These methods have been central to young people's faith formation for a long time, but the influence of a networking society is changing that.

The challenges raise concerns about the relevance of the RCZ's faith formation methods. It can be said that these formal structures no longer fully address young people's spiritual needs. As Chisala (2021:20) notes, many young people seek guidance beyond institutional settings, turning to social media and online communities. Similarly, Campbell (2020:67) highlights how digital platforms have redefined religious participation, allowing youth to explore faith beyond church boundaries.

It remains unclear how the RCZ can continue to contribute to the faith formation of young people in this context. Therefore, this study examines the RCZ's role in the faith formation of young people within a networking society using the Kaunda Square Congregation in the Lusaka District of Zambia as a case study. By analyzing contributions and limitations, as well as the experiences of pastors, youth workers, and young people, the research explores challenges and



opportunities. The study provides insight into how the RCZ can respond to its ecclesial role in the faith formation of young people within the networking society.

### **1.3 Research questions**

#### ***1.3.1 Main research question***

The main research question of this thesis is: What is the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in the faith formation of young people within a networking society, and how can this role be evaluated from the perspective of the ecclesial task of faith formation? However, for this question to be answered widely, further secondary questions must be asked. These secondary questions are:

#### ***1.3.2 Sub-Questions***

1. How do young people in the RCZ experience their faith formation, and what role does the Church play in this process?
2. How do church leaders and youth workers in the RCZ consider their role in the faith formation of young people within a networking society?
3. In what way is the faith formation of young people a task of the church in the networking society?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To explore the lived experiences of young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia regarding their faith formation and examine the role the church plays in that process.
2. To explore the views of church leaders and youth workers on their role in the faith formation of young people in a networking society.
3. To examine faith formation as a task of the church in a networking society, focusing on how the church engages with young people in a networking society.

### **1.5 Purpose of the study**

This study investigates the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in the faith formation of young people within a networking society, with a specific focus on Kaunda Square Congregation as a case study in the Lusaka District. The relevance of this study is threefold: ecclesial, educational, and academic.

#### ***1.5.1 Ecclesial Relevance***

The Reformed Church in Zambia, like many churches in Zambia, is currently ministering in a context where young people are surrounded and shaped by a networked society that is leaving behind traditional religious structures (Campbell, 2020:33). This reality challenges the

church's conventional methods of faith formation, particularly for young people. The study is relevant to the RCZ's ecclesial task because it brings attention to how young people experience faith formation in today's networked society (Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, 2017:79). By engaging the perspectives of both young people and church leaders, this research provides the RCZ with a reflective outline to evaluate its ways of faith formation of young people within the networking society. It contributes to the church's call to be both faithful to its confessional heritage and flexible to the realities of a new generation of networking among young people (Ndereba, 2021:58).

### ***1.5.2 Educational Relevance***

Faith formation is not limited to the pulpit only; it involves lifelong spiritual learning that takes place in different ways, for example, in homes, schools, churches, and now increasingly through different networks and online platforms. Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, 2017:79). This study contributes to Christian education in Zambia by enlightening the various spaces influencing the faith formation of young people today. It highlights the need for the church to support educational efforts, including Sunday school, youth fellowships, digital Bible study groups, and mentorship (Smith & Denton, 2005:163). The findings can help faith-based educators, youth workers, and school chaplains to design more holistic and youth-friendly programs that address the moral, spiritual, and intellectual needs of young people growing up in a networked society (Mackenzie, 2017:142; Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, 2017:103–104).

### ***1.5.3 Academic Relevance***

Academically, this research addresses a gap in both local and global scholarship by offering empirical and theological reflections from a Zambian context. While much has been written on youth faith formation in the West, few studies have explored how African churches, particularly within the Reformed Church in Zambia, engage young people in a network era (Chisala (2021:20). Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship from practical theology (Root, 2021:76), digital religion (Campbell, 2020:45), African Practical theologian (Ndereba, 2021:73)., and networks for faith formation (Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, 2017:12), this study provides an outline for understanding faith formation as relational, contextual, and formed by developing networks. It advances conversations on missional ecclesiology and youth ministry by demonstrating how African congregations can meaningfully respond to the shifting forms of authority, participation, and identity in today's networked society (Ndereba, 2021:73).

In summary, this study is important because it provides a critical understanding of how the RCZ can position itself better in the faith formation of young people amidst a changing

networking society. By examining the perspectives of both young people and church leaders, the research identifies gaps, possibilities, and dilemmas in the current faith formation practices of the RCZ.

### **1.7 Operational Definition of Terms**

**Role:** The term “role” is used to refer to the function or responsibility that a person, organization, or institution is responsible for performing in a certain environmental context. (Chisala, 2021, 9-10). A larger aim or purpose is supported by the specific duties, actions, and impacts that an organization has to achieve that objective or purpose. Within the context of this paradigm, the term “role” refers to the unique influence and duty that the Reformed Church in Zambia has in terms of directing and shaping the faith development of young people, particularly within the context of a culture that encourages networking.

**Faith Formation:** Faith formation is the process by which individuals grow, deepen, and deepen their religious views, values, and practices. Roberto (2018, 28) notes that this process continues throughout one’s life and involves critical reflection, spiritual instruction, and participation in religious community practices. It includes personal introspection, engagement with Scripture, and involvement in religious events that shape one’s identity and moral imagination.

In the context of this study, faith formation refers to how the Reformed Church in Zambia nurtures the spiritual life of young people. This involves offering them opportunities to grow in their Christian faith, to engage actively in communal worship and learning, and to express their beliefs in everyday life. This formation is especially important in a society increasingly shaped by digital technologies, where online interactions compete with or complement traditional modes of discipleship.

De Kock and Sonnenberg (2016:195) emphasize the importance of ritual participation, especially in the Lord’s Supper, as a developmental practice for young people. Their empirical research indicates that young people often connect deeply with worship rituals when these are made relevant to their context and linked with learning processes. They argue that such rituals create “symbolic links” that help young people integrate faith into daily life and offer spaces where theological reflection becomes embodied and relational (De Kock and Sonnenberg, 2016:195–198). This perspective affirms the significance of experiential, participatory learning in faith formation and suggests that youth spirituality flourishes in spaces where communal practices are made personally meaningful.

Thus, in this study, faith formation is not just understood as doctrinal instruction or moral discipline but as a holistic and participating process that includes ritual, narrative, community, and networking. The RCZ's role in facilitating this process, particularly in light of changing technological and cultural landscapes, is central to the theological and practical inquiry of this research.

**Networking Society:** In a social environment known as a networking society, digital networks, which include social media platforms, online communities, and technology that are connected together, are the primary means by which relationships, communication, and the flow of information are maintained. (Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, 2017:9-10). Because social and professional encounters in a society that is based on networking often take place on digital platforms rather than in person, this has an impact on how individuals communicate with one another, how they exchange ideas, and how they construct their identities. When it comes to young people, this indicates that a significant portion of their social life, including their experiences linked to spirituality and religion, is shaped through online interactions. This may provide both opportunities and challenges for the development of their religious beliefs and practices. (Emery-Wright & Mackenzie, 2017:9-10).

**Ecclesial task** refers to the church's responsibilities in the faith formation of its members, particularly through practices such as worship, discipleship, catechesis, service, and proclamation (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). In the Reformed tradition, and specifically within the Reformed Church in Zambia, these tasks are institutionalized in the Church Order/constitution. According to the RCZ Church constitution and by-laws (BP 57.1, 2013:65), the church is responsible for the "instruction of the young people in the Christian faith through catechism, youth fellowship, and regular pastoral guidance." This indicates that faith formation is an officially recognized responsibility of the church leadership and congregational life and the focus is on instruction in Christian faith through several practices.

When applied to young people, the ecclesial task involves actively equipping them to grow in their knowledge of Scripture, participate in the life of the church, and discern their Christian identity in light of social networking realities, including digital environments. By examining the RCZ's ecclesial task, this study evaluates how the church lives out its stated commitment to the faith formation of young people in the context of a networking society.

## **1.8 Research structure**

1. Chapter One Introduction: Introduces the research problem, questions, objectives, significance, and structure of the thesis.
2. Chapter Two Literature Review: Reviews key literature on youth, faith formation, and network society. Youth culture theology, contextual theology, and the missiological lens guiding the study.
3. Chapter Three Methodology: Describes the qualitative case study approach, data collection through online interviews and focus groups, and thematic analysis. Includes ethical considerations.
4. Chapter Four Empirical Findings: Presents and analyses findings through five themes: Spiritual Growth, Technology, and Spiritual Connection, Youth as Theological Agents, Opportunities and Challenges in a Network Society, Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation
5. Chapter Five Discussion of Findings: Evaluate the findings through the lens of the ecclesial task of faith formation, integrating empirical data with theological insights and church practices.
6. Chapter Six Conclusion and Recommendations: Summarises findings, reflects on implications for church practice and theology, and offers personal scholarly reflection. Includes recommendations and identifies areas for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Faith formation among young people within the Reformed Church in Zambia occurs in a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape marked by globalization, digital technology, and the growth of a networking society. These transformations affect not only how young people access and process religious knowledge but also how they build relationships and experience community. The chapter interacts with various literature studying the main research question which examines how RCZ can rethink its ecclesial role in the faith formation of young people within a networking society. The chapter identifies and evaluates key academic and theological understandings that inform this study's theoretical outline and empirical analysis.

The review chapter draws on key authors studying faith formation such as Steven Emery-Wright and Ed Mackenzie, Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, Andrew Root, Christian Smith, and Grenz, alongside other relevant voices in the fields of youth ministry, practical theology, and ecclesiology. Most of the literature on the faith formation of young people is still written by Western authors. However, faith formation and networking among young people in Africa particularly in Zambia is there. Because of this reality, this literature engages considerably with these authors. However, the researcher also incorporates African scholars in youth ministry.

The chapter begins by defining the concept of faith formation and its theological foundation, followed by an exploration of how youth culture and the rise of digital networks influence faith experiences. It then examines the relational and social dimensions of young people's spirituality, the specific role of the church in nurturing faith formation, and the unique challenges and opportunities present within the networking society. These thematic categories serve to structure the discussion and provide a comprehensive picture of how faith formation is both experienced and facilitated in the Zambian context.

Lastly engaging with the existing literature, drawing from theological, sociological, and practical perspectives on youth formation within the networking society, the researcher develops a conceptual outline. This outline informs the data collection process, allowing for the testing of key insights about how young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia experience faith formation and how the church contributes to that process.

### **2.2 Relational Dynamics in Youth Faith Formation**

Relational dynamics have developed as an integral factor in youth faith formation, with scholars increasingly recognizing that faith is most effectively nurtured within communities of

meaningful interpersonal connections. Emery-Wright and Mackenzie (2017:4–5) argue that relationships serve as the primary “networks” through which faith is transmitted and sustained among young people. Their concept of “relational bonds” underscores the centrality of trust, mentorship, and shared spiritual practices within intergenerational and peer relationships. These dynamics, according to the authors, do not only support faith formation, they are themselves developing spaces where young people learn to articulate and express their beliefs.

Root (2007:20–22), working from a theological-psychological structure, contends that relational authenticity is necessary for youth ministry. He proposes a Christocentric relational model where adults are called not to manage or fix youth, but to “be with” them in their moments of vulnerability. Root’s theology of place-sharing suggests that the divine encounter happens through relationships that mirror God’s incarnational presence, a perspective that supports an experiential and sensitive approach to faith formation.

Kevin Muriithi Ndereba (2021:182–184), writing from a sub-Saharan African context, supports these claims by showing how Kenyan youth in Nairobi deeply value community and peer engagement in their faith formation journeys. He emphasizes that faith formation is rarely an isolated process but rather one interworks into communal times such as youth fellowships, music ministries, and storytelling. This community-oriented spirituality corresponds with African communal worldviews and underlines the importance of nurturing shared, rather than individualistic, approaches to Christian faith formation.

Grenz (2000:58–60) further contributes to this dialogue by emphasizing that identity and belief among young people are forged in the context of “trusted adults and intentional relationships.” She advocates for churches to become “communities of belonging” where youth experience acceptance before belief, an inversion of traditional ecclesial logic that often demands doctrinal conformity as a condition for full participation.

Moreover, Christian Smith’s (2005:162–165) concept of “moralistic therapeutic deism,” drawn from his research on American teens, explains how a lack of authentic relational engagement in churches can lead to shallow, individualistic forms of spirituality. His findings underscore the need for churches, including the Reformed Church in Zambia, to move beyond programmatic models and toward deeper relational investment in young people.

In summary, the literature supports the view that relationality is not an optional component but a core dimension of effective faith formation. Whether viewed from Western, African, or global perspectives, scholars join on the understanding that intergenerational connection,

mentorship, and relational trust provide the fertile soil in which youthful faith can grow. For the RCZ, this insight implies a shift toward more relationally engaged models of youth ministry that integrate mentorship, community belonging, and spiritual companionship.

### **2.3 Youth Culture and its Impact on Faith Formation**

Youth culture plays a vital role in shaping how young people engage with and experience their faith formation. It encompasses not just music, language, and fashion but also values, worldviews, and digital practices that influence how spirituality is lived and expressed. In the context of African urban youth, Kevin Muriithi Ndereba (2021:112–115) provides an in-depth analysis of how contemporary youth culture in Nairobi impacts holistic faith formation. He emphasizes that youth are not just passive recipients of culture but active creators who interpret and reformulate Christian messages through their cultural point of view. This is especially evident in practices such as gospel music, social media testimonies, and Christian youth gatherings, which serve as platforms for identity formation and communal spirituality.

Ndereba (2021:132–136) further argues that for youth in African cities, spirituality is not separated but integrated into the everyday times of life, where faith is mediated through popular culture. He warns, however, of the danger of syncretism and cultural superficiality when the church fails to critically engage youth culture with theological depth. This tension calls for what he terms a “critical contextualization” that affirms cultural expressions while offering biblical discernment.

Steven Emery-Wright and Ed Mackenzie (2017:15–18) resonate with this need for contextual sensitivity, noting that young people's faith formation today is often expressed through storytelling, art, and digital media rather than through traditional confessional or doctrinal means. They argue that faith formation in this setting requires openness to diverse forms of meaning-making, especially in non-institutional spaces where young people often explore faith. The authors suggest that churches need to recognize and affirm these alternative spiritual expressions as valid sites of discipleship and theological reflection.

Christian Smith's (2005:122–125) sociological insights offer a warning. His research among American youth reveals a tendency toward a diluted form of faith he describes as “moralistic therapeutic deism,” where God is seen as a distant helper rather than an active presence. While his context is different from that of the RCZ, Smith's findings raise important concerns about what happens when church teaching does not engage youth culture seriously namely, the rise



of individualized, non-communal forms of faith that lack theological depth and ecclesial grounding.

In the African context, youth culture is also shaped by socio-economic factors such as unemployment, peer pressure, and urbanization, which impact spiritual growth. As Ndereba (2021:157–159) observes, these realities often push young people toward prosperity gospel movements or charismatic expressions that promise hope and success. The RCZ, therefore, must engage the young people not only theologically but also socially, addressing real-life challenges through holistic discipleship.

In sum, the literature shows that youth culture is a vital arena for faith formation. Rather than viewing it as a threat, the church is called to embrace youth culture as a mission field, a source of theological insight, and a space for co-creating faithful expressions of Christian life. For the RCZ, this entails listening to young people, embracing their cultural narratives, and co-developing models of ministry that are both contextually relevant and biblically grounded.

#### **2.4 Digital Networks and Faith Formation**

In the age of global connectivity, digital networks such as social media, online forums, and mobile apps have become primary spaces where young people engage with faith formation. These platforms provide opportunities for learning, connection, and spiritual expression that often extend beyond traditional church settings. Scholars such as Emery-Wright and Mackenzie (2017:21–23) argue that digital spaces now serve as “informal yet powerful sites of theological formation” for young people, often functioning as complementary or even primary sources of spiritual nurture.

These authors note that digital environments facilitate “network faith” an event in which spiritual growth occurs through relational and interactive channels rather than through top-down transmission of doctrine. This mirrors the lived experience of many young people, particularly in Zambia, where smartphones and internet access are increasingly common among urban and peri-urban young people. The relational nature of these networks supports peer learning, access to role models, and immediate responses to spiritual questions, often in real-time (Emery-Wright & Mackenzie 2017:27–30).

Kevin Muriithi Ndereba (2021:194–196) similarly observes that in Nairobi, digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are widely used by young Christians to share scripture, preach, pray, and encourage each other. However, he warns that while these platforms can liberalize access to spiritual content, they also pose challenges. These include

theological shallowness, the spread of misinformation, and a commercial approach to faith, where young people “pick and choose” teachings without deep accountability or discernment (Ndereba 2021:198–199).

Andrew Root (2007:35–37) evaluates the tendency of churches to view technology as a simple tool, rather than recognizing its capacity to reshape the very nature of relationships and theological reflection. Root cautions that digital interaction often risks superficial engagement and transactional faith encounters. However, when used wisely and with relational intentionality, digital tools can enhance the Church's ministry to young people by offering spaces of vulnerability, story-sharing, and reflection.

Smith (2005:115) contributes to this conversation by suggesting that today's media-saturated environment has led to the commodification of religion. Young people tend to absorb spirituality in part, shaped by automatic patterns feeds rather than coherent discipleship processes. This highlights the need for churches, including the RCZ, to provide critical digital literacy and theological reflection spaces where young people can engage in faith content deeply and thoughtfully.

From a practical theological perspective, Grenz (2000:90–93) emphasizes that digital engagement must be relational and grounded in community, rather than detached from embodied ecclesial life. She argues that online faith formation is most effective when integrated into the broader life of the Church, ensuring that what is experienced online is also lived and tested within accountable, face-to-face relationships.

In the Zambian context, while internet penetration is uneven across rural and urban settings, young people in cities such as Lusaka and Ndola are increasingly forming WhatsApp groups for Bible study, participating in live-streamed services, and following Christian influencers. This suggests that the RCZ must not ignore the digital world but rather engage it in missional, equipping young people to navigate these spaces theologically, ethically, and communally.

In summary, the literature affirms that digital networks offer both promise and threat in youth faith formation. While they provide spaces for creativity, community, and expression, they also require critical guidance from the Church or others. The RCZ is therefore called to discern, guide, and participate in these digital networks with intentionality, recognizing them as integral spaces where young people are forming and reforming their faith identities.

## **2.5 The Role of the Church in Faith Formation**

The role of the Church in young people's faith formation is central and many-sided, encompassing worship, teaching, mentorship, and pastoral care. In examining how churches support or hinder spiritual growth among young people, scholars emphasize both the intentional structures and the relational ethos of church communities. Kevin Muriithi Ndereba (2021:169–171) stresses that in the African context, the church must provide holistic formation that attends to the spiritual, emotional, social, and economic dimensions of a young person's life. In his Nairobi-based study, Ndereba found that many youths experience the church as a moral space that provides guidance, support, and identity amid rapid urban change. However, he also warns against excessively dogmatic or programmatic approaches that hold in creativity and contextual relevance.

Steven Emery-Wright and Ed Mackenzie (2017:35–37) advocate for a rethink church that operates not as an institution of control but as a community of accompaniment. They argue that effective churches are those that listen deeply, raise agency, and journey with young people in their faith questions and life struggles. The traditional model of youth ministry, based on events, entertainment, or didactic teaching, is increasingly being replaced by relational, participatory, and dialogical approaches where youth are co-creators in their discipleship.

Root (2007:46–49) proposes that the Church's role is best described in terms of incarnational presence, mirroring Christ's presence with humanity. This model calls for churches to share in the lived experiences of young people rather than just ministering “to” or “at” them. Root's emphasis on “place-sharing” challenges church leaders to create space for lament, vulnerability, and doubt, all of which are authentic aspects of the faith journey. For the Reformed Church in Zambia, this could involve shifting from didactic Sunday school formats to dialogical youth Bible studies that embrace personal storytelling and contextual theology.

Christian Smith (2005:163–165) supports the importance of ecclesial engagement by showing how teenagers who are deeply embedded in church life, especially where there is intergenerational mentorship, are more likely to retain their faith into adulthood. His research confirms that only attendance is insufficient. Rather, consistent spiritual modeling, relational investment, and theological clarity are what sustain long-term faith formation. This has implications for RCZ congregations, many of which have limited capacity for youth leadership development and often relegate youth to minor roles.

Grenz (2000:44–47) calls on churches to function as communities of grace, where youth can belong before they believe or behave “correctly.” Her emphasis on belonging as a precursor to belief highlights the Church's pastoral role in creating safe and inclusive spiritual homes. She notes that churches must pay attention not only to the content of their teaching but also to the emotional tone and relational culture of the congregation. Young people are less likely to engage in doctrinal learning if they feel judged, excluded, or silenced.

In the Zambian setting, the RCZ has historically provided structured avenues for youth formation through catechism classes, Christian youth fellowships (CYF), and Sunday school. However, these structures are often under-resourced, and leadership roles are frequently dominated by older members. This leads to a disconnect between the Church's theology and the lived experiences of young people navigating a rapidly digitizing and networked society. There is therefore a pressing need for the RCZ to re-evaluate its ecclesial practices, promoting youth inclusion in leadership, encouraging contextual theology, and reimagining liturgical spaces to reflect youth voices.

In summary, the Church plays a critical role in the faith formation of young people, not just through teaching and programming but through relational authenticity, intergenerational engagement, and contextual responsiveness. The literature points to a growing consensus: churches that prioritize listening, mentoring, and collaboration with youth are best placed to nurture enduring faith. For the RCZ, this requires strategic theological reflection, resource allocation, and structural adaptation to meet the developing needs of its younger members.

## **2.6 Challenges and Opportunities in Youth Faith Formation**

While the church plays a vital role in the spiritual development of young people, both the literature and contextual realities point to significant challenges and emerging opportunities in this area. These challenges are not unique but resonate with wider African and global church contexts.

### ***2.6.1 Challenges in Faith Formation Structures***

One of the core challenges noted in the literature is the gap between youth culture and church culture. Ndereba (2021:234–236) observes that traditional church structures often fail to resonate with the lived experiences of youth, especially in urban and peri-urban areas. This cultural dissonance leads to feelings of alienation, prompting some young people to disengage from formal church activities. Similarly, Grenz (2000:96) argues that rigid ecclesial models

that prioritize doctrinal instruction over relational engagement can push away young people who are navigating complex personal and cultural transitions.

Moreover, the hierarchical nature of leadership in many RCZ congregations can inhibit the participation of young people in decision-making and ministry leadership. As Smith (2005:171–174) indicates, youth need to feel that their presence and voice matter in shaping the church’s mission. When they are marginalized, they are less likely to commit deeply to church life.

Resource limitations also present a major challenge. Many RCZ congregations struggle with inadequate infrastructure for youth ministry, including a lack of trained youth workers, discipleship materials, and pastoral support. (Ndereba 2021:168–169). This often results in youth fellowships becoming social gatherings with little intentional spiritual content, or being overrun by adult-centered agendas.

Theologically, there is often a disconnect between faith formation content and the lived realities of youth. Emery-Wright and Mackenzie (2017:31–34) note that for faith to be meaningful, it must engage the questions young people are asking, about identity, sexuality, mental health, and social justice. The absence of these themes in RCZ curricula limits the Church’s capacity to form resilient, reflective disciples.

### ***2.6.2 Emerging Opportunities for Holistic Faith Formation***

Despite these challenges, the literature also points to significant opportunities for enhancing faith formation. A consistent theme is the need for relational, contextual, and participating models of faith formation. Root (2007:54) encourages churches to adopt “incarnational youth ministry” where leaders are fully present in the joys and struggles of young people. For the RCZ, this could involve training local youth mentors who journey with peers in spiritual and life matters.

Emery-Wright and Mackenzie (2017:41–44) propose the use of faith-forming networks, both digital and physical, that connect youth with mentors, peers, and intergenerational partners. These networks serve as webs of support, creating a sense of belonging and identity. In the Zambian context, this could include strengthening family involvement in youth ministry, engaging schools, and creating cross-congregational youth exchanges.

Smith (2005:119–122) affirms that young people who encounter authentic, relational, and consistent faith environments are more likely to develop a lasting Christian identity. Thus,

churches must not only provide content but also model Christian life through community, justice, and service. For RCZ youth, involvement in outreach programs, social entrepreneurship, or environmental projects can provide practical avenues for integrating faith and life.

Ndereba (2021:251–254) urges churches to rethink their theology of youth, not as “becoming” adults but as fully gifted members of the Body of Christ today. This re-theologizing opens the door for youth to be involved in preaching, liturgy, Bible interpretation, and decision-making structures, which are all vital elements of ecclesial faith formation.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This literature review reveals that young people experience faith formation through a complex interplay of church involvement, peer relationships, personal reflection, and cultural engagement, all within the broader structure of a networking society. The reviewed literature underscores the importance of relational and contextual models of faith formation that prioritize authenticity, agency, and spiritual companionship over programmatic instruction. Authors such as Emery-Wright, Mackenzie, and Root emphasize that in today’s society, effective faith formation must adapt to how youth connect, communicate, and construct meaning.

The RCZ, like many other mainline churches in Africa, faces several challenges in sustaining meaningful youth engagement, including generational gaps, limited resources, and outdated methods of ministry. Yet, there are also significant opportunities to transform these challenges into growth points by promoting inclusive leadership, integrating digital tools, and prioritizing holistic discipleship. As Grenz and Smith suggest, churches that become communities of grace and intergenerational faith-sharing are best positioned to guide youth toward enduring faith.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology employed in conducting the research on “Rethinking the Role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in Faith Formation of Young People within a Networking Society: A Case of Kaunda Square Congregation in Lusaka, Zambia.” It outlines the research design, theological orientation, target population, sampling techniques, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, ethical considerations, and the underlying assumptions guiding the study. Methodological decisions were guided by the need to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by young people within the Reformed Church in Zambia with depth, accuracy, and contextual sensitivity (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Silverman, 2020).

### **3.2 Theological and Methodological Orientation**

This is a practical theological study. Practical theology is concerned with everyday life and the ordinary realities in which faith is lived out. It involves theological reflection on lived experience and enables the Church to interpret life in the light of faith. In a networking society, where young people’s practices and identities are shaped by digital media and peer relationships, practical theology offers tools to understand how faith is formed and expressed (Anderson 2001,15).

Practical theology draws from many disciplines as well as theological sub-disciplines. The focus is on (faith) practices, methods, and theories from many disciplines that might be helpful to analyze these practices. In this study besides theological sources and concepts, pedagogical and sociological concepts are mainly used. This thesis focus on the faith formation of young people whose religious experiences are increasingly mediated by digital technologies and social networks. (Anderson 2001,15).

In Zambia, RCZ youth ministry practices include Bible study groups, youth camps, drama, music ministries, and church conferences. These have traditionally emphasized face-to-face mentorship and moral instruction. However, youth are now organizing Bible study discussions on WhatsApp, following spiritual influencers on TikTok, and participating in online worship services. This shift raises new questions about authority, authenticity, and community, questions which practical theology helps to address (Swinton and Mowat, 2016, 4–5).

Swinton and Mowat emphasize that practical theology involves critical theological reflection on the Church's practices in real-life situations. It is not only the application of theory to

practice but rather a dynamic process in which lived experience informs theological understanding (Swinton and Mowat, 2016, 14–16). This is particularly relevant for institutions like the RCZ as they navigate faith formation among young people in a networked society.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore the lived faith experiences of young people in the networking society. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of complex spiritual and social dynamics through rich narrative data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, 179–181). The phenomenological method focuses on capturing how individuals make sense of their personal experiences (Van Manen, 2021:25–28). This is particularly useful in theological studies seeking to understand how faith is lived, interpreted, and practiced by young people in networking contexts.

#### **3.3.1 Gatekeeper**

Due to the researcher's residence outside Zambia during the period of data collection, Rev. Charles Ngoma, the resident minister of RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation in Lusaka, was engaged as a gatekeeper. He provided essential support in organizing and coordinating the focus group discussions with the young people and the church leaders. His role included liaising with the church leadership, inviting youth participants, securing a venue, and ensuring that the process adhered to ethical guidelines. Rev. Ngoma was thoroughly briefed on the research aims, ethical procedures, and methods of obtaining informed consent. While he did not participate in or influence the content of the discussions, his presence contributed to a familiar and trusted environment for the participants. The researcher maintained close communication with Rev. Ngoma throughout the process, offering guidance to ensure that the data collection aligned with the study's objectives and upheld academic standards of integrity and confidentiality.

#### **3.3.2 Selection of Participants**

Participants were selected from Kaunda Square Congregation using purposive sampling, a common method in phenomenological studies. The goal was to engage individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon under the study of faith formation in a digital context (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, 147). The local pastor, Rev. Charles Ngoma, served as a gatekeeper who helped organize a focus group discussion. This was crucial, as the researcher was not present in Zambia during data collection.



### ***3.3.3 Target Population***

The target population for the study comprised young people aged between 15 and 35 years who are active members of the Reformed Church in Zambia, Kaunda Square Congregation. This age group was selected because it represents a critical transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, during which faith identity is often solidified or re-negotiated (Smith, 2019). In addition to youth members, church leaders responsible for youth ministry, including pastors and youth coordinators, were also part of the broader population to provide complementary insights into the institutional approaches toward faith formation. Focusing on this demographic provided a comprehensive understanding of both the experiences of young people and the strategies employed by the church to nurture their spiritual development.

### ***3.3.4 Sample Size***

The study engaged a sample size of 15 participants drawn from the Kaunda Square congregation in Lusaka. Out of the 15 participants, 10 were young church members while 5 were youth leaders and pastors directly involved in youth ministry. The selection of a relatively small, purposive sample aligned with phenomenological research standards, which prioritize depth of understanding over generalizability (Smith:2021:34). A sample of this size was considered adequate for achieving saturation, wherein no new themes or significant insights emerged during the data analysis phase, as suggested by Saunders et al. (2018:54).

### ***3.3.5 Sampling Techniques***

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who were most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This technique allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals based on specific criteria, such as active church participation, willingness to share personal faith experiences, and involvement in youth activities (Etikan, 2019:54). Snowball sampling was also employed to identify additional participants through referrals, particularly in reaching youth leaders who were not initially listed but whose experiences proved valuable to the study. This approach enhanced the depth and breadth of the data collected while maintaining focus on participants directly involved in faith formation processes.

### ***3.3.6 Relationship Between Theory and Empirical Data***

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach that brings empirical data into critical dialogue with theological and practical theories on youth faith formation. The study positions the voices of young people and church leaders, gathered through focus group discussions at

Kaunda Square Congregation as active contributors to shaping, questioning, and expanding theoretical perspectives.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two provided a critical foundation for the design and focus of the research instruments. These theoretical lenses informed the formulation of focus group questions and highlighted the significance of relational bonds, spiritual development, and spiritual agency within the context of a networking society.

The empirical findings especially the lived experiences, relational dynamics, and spiritual expressions of young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia offer a contextual understanding through which theoretical assumptions can be evaluated. These findings help to affirm, nuance, or contest prevailing academic claims. For instance, the emphasis on peer relationships and the supportive role of church leaders align with Emery-Wright and MacKenzie's (2017:38) view of intergenerational relational networks as essential for spiritual growth. Meanwhile, the disconnection some youths feel from traditional church programs reflects Root's (2007:80–83) critique of institutional approaches to youth ministry in a postmodern context.

This dialogical engagement reflects the hermeneutical circle, where theory and practice mutually inform one another. As Osmer (2008:11-13) asserts, practical theological interpretation involves a constant interaction between empirical realities and normative theological perspectives, promoting a more grounded and contextually informed articulation of the Church's task in nurturing youth faith formation.

### ***3.3.7 Research Instruments***

The primary research instruments used were semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion protocols. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a flexible yet systematic exploration of participants' experiences while providing room for follow-up questions and clarification based on participants' responses (Guest: 2020:23). Focus group discussions were conducted with young members to generate collective understandings, explore group dynamics, and stimulate conversation that might not emerge in individual interviews. All research instruments were pilot-tested with a small group of three participants to ensure clarity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity before actual data collection commenced.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted via telephone and Skype. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes, and focus groups lasted around

90 minutes. Sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent. Field notes were taken to supplement audio data with observations of tone, pauses, and group interactions (Braun and Clarke, 2021:39–41) Focus group discussions were also held in church halls, with groups comprising 10 participants, the session lasting approximately 90 minutes. To ensure data richness, the researcher employed active listening, probing questions, and observational notes to capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics (Braun:2021:40).

#### ***3.4.1 Digital Observations***

Due to the researcher's absence from Zambia, digital ethnography was used as a supplementary method. The study observed RCZ's youth engagement on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and livestreamed services. These digital spaces offered an understanding of real-time faith expressions and community interactions.

While offering access to meaningful data, this method also posed limitations. It excluded non-verbal cues and potentially overrepresented curated digital personas. Nonetheless, it enriched the study's understanding of RCZ's adaptation to the network society and youth's digital religious practices.

#### ***3.4.2 Reflections on the Pilot Study***

A pilot study was conducted with three participants earlier to full-scale data collection. This initial stage tested the clarity, social relevance, and thematic coverage of the semi-structured interview and focus group procedures. It also underlined the importance of allowing participants to share narrative-based responses, leading to the incorporation of more open-ended questions. Technically, the pilot confirmed the reliability of the recording tools and online communication platforms used. These adjustments contributed to more effective data collection by enhancing rapport, responsiveness, and the contextual relevance of the research instruments.

#### ***3.4.3 Data Analysis***

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, following Braun's (2021,40) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Audio recordings were transcribed, and transcripts were manually coded to identify significant statements and recurring patterns related to faith formation, networking society influences, challenges, and gaps. NVivo 12 software was used to assist in organizing and managing the data effectively (Braun and Clarke, 2021,60).

### **3.5 Trustworthiness and Validity**

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the research findings, this study employed multiple strategies. Methodological triangulation was used by integrating semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and digital observations. (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:179–181).

To enhance confirmability and dependability, member-checking was conducted by providing participants with transcripts of their interviews to verify the accuracy of their contributions. This participatory approach ensured that the voices of the participants were authentically represented and contributed to a faithful interpretation of their narratives (Swinton and Mowat, 2016:76–78).

Additionally, peer debriefing was utilized as a form of analytical validation. The researcher engaged fellow scholars in discussions to review emerging interpretations and themes. This collaborative process served to minimize researcher bias and reinforce analytical rigor (Guest et al., 2020: 126). These combined strategies form a robust methodological structure that ensures trustworthiness and enhances the study's contribution to theological discourse and practical ministry strategies. In alignment with practical theology, which emphasizes the interplay between lived experience and theological reflection, these measures ensure that the findings are not only methodologically sound but theologically grounded (Swinton and Mowat, 2016:14–16).

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Consent for participation was given to the participants prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and securely storing all data. Participants were also debriefed after their interviews and provided with contact information for support services should they experience any emotional distress arising from the discussions (Wiles, 2021:26). Ethical rigor was prioritized to protect the dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the methodological approach adopted in this study has been intentionally designed to explore how young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia experience faith formation within a network society. By employing a qualitative research design, specifically focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, the study ensures that both youth and

church leaders' voices are heard, and contextual realities are respected. The use of practical theological reflection, supported by interdisciplinary insights from missiology, digital religion, and youth ministry studies, provides a healthy structure for interpreting the data. This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of lived experiences but also opens up possibilities for the RCZ to develop more responsive grounded methods for faith formation. The chosen methodology affirms the study's commitment to empirical theological research that is both contextually relevant and meaningful.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyzes the study's empirical findings, focusing on how young people in the RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation experience faith formation in the context of a networked society. Drawing from focus group discussions with the young people and the interviews with the church leaders and youth workers of the Kaunda Square congregation in Lusaka, and also the digital observation from the congregations' Facebook page. The chapter explores the lived realities, reflections, and theological understandings of young people as they handle spiritual development in both traditional and digital spaces. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), guided the identification, coding, and thematic organization of patterns emerging from data. The goal was to explore how young people experience faith formation within a networking society and the perspective of the church leaders, and youth workers and to evaluate the Reformed Church in Zambia's role in this context. Direct quotes from participants are integrated, italicized, and centered to preserve the authenticity and richness of responses.

### **4.2 Use of Participant Quotations**

In this chapter, participant quotations are used to deepen understanding, provide evidence for interpretations, and give voice to the research participants. The voices of young people, youth leaders, and church leaders from Kaunda Square Congregation are included to demonstrate key themes developing from the empirical data. Quotations have been selected to reflect a range of experiences and to highlight shared patterns as well as distinct insights.

As Saldana (2016,92) confirms, "Participant quotations should not be used just for decoration; they serve to provide evidence of the analytic claims made, give voice to participants, and explain the richness of human experience." Having this in mind, care was taken to avoid cherry-picking quotations. Selected quotes were grounded in a coding process and reflect common patterns across the dataset. The goal is not to generalize statistically but to provide a rich, contextually grounded account of youth faith formation within the Reformed Church in Zambia Kaunda Square congregation.

### **4.3 Thematic Analysis Process**

Following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach, the thematic analysis proceeded as follows:

#### ***4.3.1 Phase One: Familiarisation with the Data***

The focus group and interview transcript were read many times while making notes about initial ideas and observations, immersing in the data allowed for the recognition of repeated patterns and emotionally significant expressions. Particular attention was given to the language participants used to describe faith formation, agents of faith formation, the role of the church.

#### ***4.3.2 Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes***

In this phase, I analytically worked through the focus group, interview transcripts, and digital observation notes, generating initial codes that captured key features of the data. Codes were both descriptive and interpretive, highlighting repeated patterns such as “peer support,” “spiritual struggle,” and “digital prayer,” I coded manually, marking important expressions related to faith formation in both physical and digital contexts. This process enabled me to organize the data into manageable sections for deeper thematic development in the next phase.

#### ***4.3.3 Phase Three: Searching for Themes***

In this phase, I reviewed and grouped the initial codes into potential themes that reflected broader patterns in the data. Codes related to relational support, spiritual practices, and digital engagement were grouped to form preliminary themes such as “Community and Belonging,” “Faith in Daily Life,” and “Digital Spaces as Spiritual Arenas.” This stage involved exploring how different codes connected and overlapped, helping to shape coherent themes that captured the complexity of young people’s faith formation within both offline and online contexts in the RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation.

#### ***4.3.4 Phase Four: Reviewing Themes***

In this phase, I carefully checked the themes I had created to make sure they fit the data. I looked again at the pieces of data in each theme to see if they matched well. Some themes were changed, combined, or split to better show what young people said about their faith. I also looked at all the themes together to make sure they told a clear and complete story about how young people at RCZ Kaunda Square experience faith both in person and online.

#### ***4.3.5 Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes***

Each theme was carefully defined and named to capture its aspect. The five themes were finalized as follows: (1) Spiritual Growth: Understanding and Stages of Faith Formation (2) Technology and Spiritual Connection (3) Youth as Theological Agents (4) Opportunities and Challenges in a Networked Society (5) Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation in the Church.

#### **4.3.6 Phase Six: Producing the Report**

In the final phase, I wrote the full analysis, uniting together the themes to tell a clear story about young people's faith formation. I used examples from the focus groups, interviews, and digital observations to support the findings. The report aims to show how young people experience faith formation within both physical church settings and online networks, highlighting the challenges and opportunities faced by youth in RCZ Kaunda Square. This phase presents the results in a way that connects back to the research questions and wider literature. Below is the thematic analysis in table, 1 with a brief explanation of each theme;

Table 1.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key Insights from Empirical Data</b>
<b>1. Spiritual Growth: Understanding and Stages of Faith Formation</b>	Examines how young people interpret their spiritual journey and identify stages of maturity in faith.	Youth described faith as a personal journey that grows through prayer, Bible study, and participation in sacraments. They emphasized relational and experiential learning over doctrinal instruction.
<b>2. Technology and Spiritual Connection</b>	Explores how digital tools influence religious expression and connection with God.	Participants used Bible apps, online sermons, and gospel music platforms; some struggled with distractions and secular influences online.
<b>3. Youth as Theological Agents</b>	Highlights young people's active role in interpreting faith, asking theological questions, and shaping spiritual communities.	Youth expressed a desire to be heard, participate in leadership, and relate faith to everyday struggles like mental health and politics.
<b>4. Opportunities and Challenges in a Networked Society</b>	Evaluates how the digital age presents both tools and threats for faith formation.	Benefits included access to global Christian voices and flexible worship. Challenges included confusion from contradictory teachings and online peer pressure.
<b>5. Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation in the Church</b>	Reviews the enduring value and limitations of catechism, preaching, sacraments, and mentorship.	Youth valued traditional methods but found them sometimes rigid, unrelatable, or disconnected from their digital and social realities.

## **4.4 Findings**

### **4.4.1 Spiritual Growth: Understanding and Stages of Faith Formation**

The young people at RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation reflected various understandings and experiences of spiritual growth, revealing a dynamic process of faith formation shaped by both



traditional church structures and the networked society. The focus group discussions highlighted how youths consider faith formation not simply as a fixed state but as a developing journey involving learning, transformation, struggle, and discovery.

Participants regularly associated spiritual growth with a personal relationship with God, personal devotion, engagement in church activities, and moral behavior. Many described their growth in terms of learning to pray more consistently, understanding the Bible better, and developing self-control. One youth stated:

“Faith formation is about growing closer to God every day it is about knowing Him in your heart and living like Christ even when no one is watching” (Female youth participant, Focus Group 1, 2025).

Another participant highlighted that spiritual growth does not occur in isolation but within the context of the Christian community. Church involvement, such as participation in youth fellowship, choir, or Bible study, was often cited as a tool for spiritual growth. One young man noted, “For me, it is the fellowship that builds me. When I hear others testify or pray, it encourages me to also seek God more” That helped me understand more and grow.” These activities provided both accountability and opportunities for reflection, helping youths to internalize their beliefs and values.

The data also revealed that spiritual growth is not always direct. Some participants spoke of seasons of spiritual dryness. A participant shared, “There was a time I felt far from God. And I stopped going to youth meetings. But later, my fellowship leaders came to visit me and encourage me. These testimonies highlight that faith formation includes setbacks, which can themselves become turning points for deeper commitment and understanding.

Church leaders echoed this perspective, emphasizing that spiritual growth involves nurturing a relationship with God through communal worship, obedience to Scripture, and spiritual discipline. One church leader remarked:

“We always remind our youths that faith formation is like a journey. You walk with God through different stages, and the church, family, and personal devotions are all part of that journey” (Church Leader Interview 3, 2025). Furthermore, participants noted that faith formation must be integrated into everyday life. This practical theology approach reflects the need for lived faith that transcends formal settings.

In terms of stages, participants commonly described faith formation as unfolding through different stages within the life of the Reformed Church in Zambia. These stages were identified as important to the spiritual journey of young people, beginning from the home and gradually progressing through structured church programs. Participants reflected different levels of spiritual maturity. Some spoke about their role in mentoring younger youths or leading prayers, while others admitted to being in the early stages of faith.

“During Sunday school it taught us about who Jesus is and why we must trust God. It was fun and helped me grow in faith as a child” (Female youth participant, Focus Group 1, 2025). These different stages suggest that youth ministry should adopt a separate approach, recognizing changing needs, levels of understanding, and times of growth.

The influence of life transitions, such as moving from secondary school to college, and also entering the workforce, or experiencing family issues, was said. These changes often challenged faith but also deepened reliance on God. One participant noted, “When I lost my father, I almost gave up. But God gave me strength. That’s when I grew the most.” This indicates that spiritual growth often intensifies during a crisis or transition times. (Male youth participant, Focus Group 1, 2025).

Importantly, the mentorship and role models were named as important in guiding faith journeys. Youths expressed appreciation for church leaders and fellow believers who walked with them. “There was a time I had so many questions. An older youth helped me. That’s when I understood things better,” one participant shared. This highlights the importance of relational discipleship in nurturing spiritual growth.

In conclusion, the spiritual growth of young people at RCZ Kaunda Square is involved, and shaped by personal devotion, church participation, digital engagement, life transitions, and interpersonal support. It is a journey marked by both consistency and disruption, clarity and doubt. The church must recognize this complexity and offer spaces for honest reflection, differentiated support, and spiritual companionship that nurture faith across diverse stages of formation.

#### ***4.4.2 Technology and Spiritual Connection***

The data collected from the focus group discussions and digital observations at RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation reveal that technology is an important aspect of the spiritual lives of young people. Many participants described social media and digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Bible apps as key spaces for spiritual connection and

growth. These tools are regularly used for sharing devotionals, prayer points, Bible verses, worship songs, and testimonies. Young people emphasized that these platforms served not only as communication tools but as spaces for spiritual practice and community-building.

A recurring sentiment was that digital platforms created a sense of belonging and spiritual continuity beyond the physical church. One female participant stated, “During lockdown, we couldn’t go to church, but we followed sermons on YouTube and even had youth Bible studies on WhatsApp. It kept us connected spiritually” (Focus Group 1, 2025). This reflects a form of digital spiritual time that supports faith formation outside traditional church walls.

Young people also described how they engaged with Christian content on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook to sustain their spiritual lives. A male participant shared, “When I am alone, I listen to sermons on YouTube. It’s like having church in my room.” This personal and on-demand approach to spiritual things shows how digital media serves as a possible spiritual environment for the young people at Kaunda Square congregation.

The RCZ Kaunda Square Facebook page was also mentioned as playing a key role in promoting a sense of spiritual community. Youths are actively involved in posting and engaging with spiritual content that includes sermon clips, Scripture readings, spiritual reflections, and helping the Ministers with live-streamed services. One participant noted, “When you miss church because of other things, you can catch up online. It may not be the same as being there, but it is something.”

The WhatsApp groups were described as spiritual lifelines. Several youths testified to receiving encouragement, support, and timely prayers through these platforms. “When someone posts a prayer request, we all pray. You don’t feel alone,” one female participant shared. In moments of personal struggle or spiritual dryness, the digital community provides a sense of care and mutual support.

However, the role of technology in faith formation was not without its challenges. Participants also raised concerns about the distractions and misinformation prevailing on these same platforms. One male participant observed, “Sometimes, you are looking for a good thing to listen to but end up watching things that are not helpful.” The temptation to drift into wrong content while online was a repeated issue.

Another youth commented on the challenge of discerning true from false teachings online: “There are so many preachers online, and some confuse you. They say things that sound good,

but they are not in the Bible.” This concern points to a broader need for theological grounding and digital literacy to handle the massive sea of spiritual content.

There were also concerns about superficiality in digital spiritual practices. “Sometimes people just post Bible verses to show off, not because they believe,” one youth stated. This reflects a tension between authentic spiritual expression and performative religiosity in online spaces.

Despite these challenges, the majority of participants affirmed that digital tools have greatly enriched their spiritual lives. They emphasized the importance of balance and intentional use. As one participant summarized, “Technology is good or bad. It depends on how you use it.”

These insights highlight that for many young people at RCZ Kaunda Square congregation, technology is not simply an external tool but an integral part of their spiritual journey. It provides opportunities for learning, sharing, and connecting with others in faith. Yet, the data also underscores the need for spiritual mentorship and church guidance to help young people navigate this digital landscape wisely and meaningfully.

The church is challenged to acknowledge digital platforms as valid arenas for discipleship and to equip both young people and leaders for meaningful engagement in these spaces. Doing so affirms the real experiences of young people and strengthens the integration of faith and technology in modern Christian life.

#### ***4.4.3 Youth as Theological Agents***

Participants in the focus group regularly described themselves as active participants in the development and articulation of their faith. Young people at RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation are not just passive recipients of theological instruction but are actively involved in interpreting Scripture, leading devotions, praying for one another, and guiding their peers in spiritual matters. These roles are evident in various settings, from youth meetings to digital platforms.

In the youth fellowship, participants often take turns to lead Bible studies, preach, and offer reflections on Scripture. One young woman shared, “Stop telling us that one day we will lead. We are leading now. In small ways. Train us, trust us, walk with us.” Young people passionately desire to be recognized not just as future leaders but as present co-creators of the church mission. These expressions show that young people are deeply engaged in theological reflection, making faith their own through involved learning and teaching.

Moreover, several youths indicated that they felt empowered when given the space to contribute spiritually to the life of the church. A male youth stated, “During youth week, we

are in charge. We prepare the program, we preach, we pray, we sing. It's our time to show we can also lead as well." This hands-on involvement builds confidence and promotes a sense of ownership in the spiritual community.

Digital platforms also serve as important spaces for youth theological engagement. Posting Bible verses, writing reflections, and sharing worship songs on WhatsApp or Facebook were not seen as trivial or secondary but as significant expressions of faith. One participant said, "When I post a devotion or a verse, it's my way of preaching. Sometimes, people reply and say it helped them. That makes me feel like God is using me."

These digital acts of ministry shape the line between traditional clergy-laity roles and show that theological engagement can happen beyond formal church settings. Youths are creating and sharing theological content that speaks to their contexts, using everyday language and real-life experiences to express their understanding of God.

Church leaders also acknowledged the role of young people as spiritual contributors. One elder noted, "The youths are not just the future; they are doing the work of ministry now. They are preaching, they are praying, and we see their impact." However, some leaders also expressed concern that without guidance, this agency might lack theological depth. "We need to guide them so they grow in truth, not just zeal," another elder cautioned.

The theme of mentorship and intergenerational dialogue emerged strongly. Young people expressed a desire for more support from older church members to help them grow in their theological understanding. As one youth mentioned, "We want to learn, but sometimes the elders just tell us what to do instead of walking with us." This points to a need for collaborative spaces where young people and older members can engage in theological reflection together.

At the same time, the sense of mutual learning was evident. A few participants described moments when their contributions led older members to reflect more deeply. "I once shared my thoughts during Bible study, and an elder came to thank me afterward. He said I helped him see the verse differently, one participant recalled. Such exchanges suggest that youth contributions are not only developmental for themselves but also the broader congregation.

In summary, young people at RCZ Kaunda Square are not simply being formed, they are forming the faith community. Through leadership in youth groups, digital expressions of faith, and theological conversations, they are shaping the church's theology in their language and contexts. Recognizing them as theological agents calls for a church posture that values,

supports, and walks alongside youth in their journey of faith. This will not only empower the young people but will also renew the church as a whole, ensuring a vibrant, contextually grounded theology that resonates with current and future generations.

#### ***4.4.4 Opportunities and Challenges in a Network Society***

The networked society in which young people at RCZ Kaunda Square find themselves presents a web of opportunities and challenges for faith formation. From the gathered data, it is noted that this digital environment offers opportunities to access spiritual resources, global communities of faith, and personalized pathways for spiritual growth. However, these same features come with major risks, tensions, and limitations that shape the way faith is formed and expressed.

One of the key opportunities identified by participants is the liberalizing of religious knowledge. Digital platforms allow young people to explore a variety of theological perspectives and devotional materials. A youth shared, “I follow worship sessions from Hillsong and also listen to sermons by African pastors on YouTube. It has helped me grow spiritually even when I miss church.” This global access increases theological horizons and introduces new scopes to their understanding of faith. As well, it promotes a sense of belonging to a global church, connecting Zambian young people with fellow believers across cultural and geographical boundaries.

Another positive aspect of the networked society is the independence it grants young people in shaping their spiritual practices. Youth participants emphasized the ability to choose when, where, and how they engage with spiritual content. One participant mentioned, “If I miss church on Sunday, I can still watch a sermon during the week. It’s flexible, and I can choose what helps me most.” This flexibility provides to the various schedules and learning styles of young people, allowing for more personalized and continuous spiritual engagement.

Moreover, the networked society encourages innovation in faith practices. From creating digital devotionals and related to hosting prayer meetings over Zoom or WhatsApp calls, young people are innovating new modes of spiritual expression. These creative versions demonstrate the spirit and creativity of youth in integrating faith with their digital lifestyles.

However, these opportunities are not without challenges. One major concern is the fragmentation of the community. Several participants lamented that while digital tools provide connection, they can also lead to isolation and shallow relationships. A participant noted, “We talk on WhatsApp, but sometimes I feel lonely. It’s not the same as being together.” This

explains the emotional and relational gap that digital interactions can produce, potentially weakening the communal aspect of the Christian faith.

Another challenge is the abundance of free-for-all spiritual content online. While young people access various teachings, not all sources are biblically sound. Participants expressed confusion when confronted with conflicting messages from various online preachers. This confusion can create spiritual instability or lead to the adoption of distorted theological views.

Moreover, digital fatigue and mental health issues emerged as critical concerns. Constant connectivity sometimes overwhelms youth, making it difficult to find moments of silence and reflection. “I feel pressured to keep up with everything. It’s exhausting,” one young person stated. This points to a spiritual challenge of maintaining depth and rest in a hyper-connected culture.

Finally, participants observed that older generations in the church often fail to understand the digital realities of youth, leading to misunderstandings and a lack of support. A youth commented, “Our parents and elders don’t get it. They think we’re just playing on our phones, but we’re doing church stuff too.” This disconnect can limit meaningful intergenerational collaboration in faith formation.

In response to these challenges, young people called for the church to engage more deliberately with digital culture. They suggested workshops on digital literacy, theological training that includes critical engagement with online content, and intentional efforts to build authentic communities both online and offline. These proposals underscore the need for the church to walk alongside youth, helping them navigate the complexities of a networked society with wisdom and support.

In summary, the networked society offers significant potential for dynamic and contextually relevant faith formation. Yet, it also presents reflective challenges that require intentional pastoral and theological responses. Recognizing the dual nature of this environment can enable the church to empower young people to grow in faith while addressing the risks and vulnerabilities they face in their digital lives.

#### ***4.4.5 Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation in the Church***

In the RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation, traditional roles and methods continue to play a major role in the faith formation of young people, even as young people engage with digital tools and broader societal influences. Despite increasing exposure to networked realities, the

foundational practices of the church, such as preaching, catechism, sacraments, mentorship, and communal worship, remain important channels through which young people encounter and grow in faith.

Young people participating in focus group discussions often cited the influence of preaching as a central means of spiritual instruction and formation. Sunday sermons were described as vital with young people indicating that they learned biblical truths, moral guidance, and encouragement through these regular themes. As one participant said, “Real-life situations, help me know how to live as a Christian and some teachings we receive are too shallow or disconnected from real issues like technology, sexuality, politics, and mental health. This suggests that contextual and relatable preaching remains a powerful tool for faith formation.

Catechism classes, particularly as part of the preparation for confirmation, were also described as key in grounding foundational theological understanding. Several participants reflected on how catechism classes introduced them to the core doctrines of the Reformed faith and prepared them for full membership. However, some youths noted that these classes were often limited in duration and did not always provide room for open questioning or contextual application. “I wish we had more time to talk and ask questions,” one youth commented, pointing to the need for more dialogical approaches in catechesis.

Participation in church sacraments, especially baptism and the Lord’s Supper was seen as deeply developmental. These sacraments mark important moments in the life of faith and provide solid expressions of belonging and grace. These experiences highlight how traditional rites continue to nurture spiritual identity and community connection.

Mentorship and intergenerational relationships were also regularly highlighted as vital traditional means of faith formation. Elders, deacons, and older youth often serve as informal guides, offering advice, prayer support, and moral direction. This relational model was viewed as deeply effective. One participant remarked, “My elder always checks on me. That makes me feel cared for and helps me stay on the right path.” Such relationships reflect the communal nature of the African Reformed tradition, where faith is seen not as an individual journey but as a shared pilgrimage.

Traditional youth programs such as youth fellowship meetings, choirs, and Bible study groups were emphasized as nurturing spaces for spiritual growth. These groups offer structured opportunities for learning, leadership development, and moral accountability. Several participants noted that such spaces provided their first opportunities to lead prayers, share



testimonies, or ask difficult questions. However, others noted that traditional programs sometimes lack creativity or fail to engage contemporary youth issues. “Sometimes it’s the same things again and again,” said one youth, signaling the need for innovation within traditional forms.

Despite these reviews, the value of traditional roles and methods is evident. These forms provide a stable structure, rooted in Reformed ecclesiology, which grounds young people’s faith amid the flexibility of the networked society. They serve as anchors, offering theological clarity, moral formation, and community belonging. However, there is a clear call for these methods to be more interactive, inclusive, and responsive to the lived realities of today’s young people.

In sum, traditional roles and methods in the RCZ continue to play a central role in the faith formation of young people. Yet, their relevance depends on ongoing revision and contextualization. The church is thus challenged to preserve its theological heritage while opening up space for innovation, dialogue, and youth participation within its longstanding practices.

#### **4.5 Summary of Findings**

Chapter Four has provided an in-depth exploration of how young people in the RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation experience faith formation within a networked society. This chapter draws on multiple sources of data, including interviews with youth, observations of church activities both in-person and online, and interviews with church leaders. The combination of these methods, method triangulation, allowed for a richer, more nuanced understanding of youth participation and the church’s role in faith formation. While interviews with young people offered personal insights into their faith journeys and digital engagement, observations captured the actual practices and interactions within the community. Additionally, conversations with church leaders shed light on the intentions and challenges behind the church’s programming and use of technology. Together, these data sources provide a comprehensive picture that goes beyond individual perspectives to include institutional and contextual dimensions. The findings demonstrate an involved but hopeful landscape in which traditional ecclesial practices, emerging digital platforms, and the personal agency of young people interconnect in meaningful ways.

First, spiritual growth, particularly the stages and understanding of faith formation. Young people identified key moments in their journey, such as home devotions, Sunday school,

catechism, confirmation, and youth fellowship. They saw faith formation as an ongoing and developmental process involving personal devotion, communal worship, and doctrinal instruction. However, they also highlighted gaps between different stages and expressed concern about post-confirmation disengagement. This calls for more continuity and intentional follow-up across all stages of formation.

Secondly, technology plays a role in the spiritual lives of young people. On one hand, it offers unprecedented access to Christian resources such as sermons, gospel music, devotionals, and virtual fellowship. Youth participants affirmed the benefits of engaging with digital platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube for personal growth and encouragement. On the other hand, they also raised valid concerns about distraction, spiritual superficiality, and exposure to misleading content. This contradiction shows that while technology is a valuable tool for faith formation, it also necessitates discernment and guidance.

Third, the theme of youth as theological agents' reveals that many young people view themselves not as passive recipients but as active participants in their spiritual formation. They articulated a desire to contribute meaningfully to church life through teaching, prayer, music, and leadership. Their narratives indicate that they value opportunities to engage Scripture and faith questions in a way that relates to their own experiences. They emphasized the need for the church to recognize and nurture their voices, creating space for theological reflection that emerges from youth contexts.

The fourth theme explored the opportunities and challenges of living in a networked society. Young people identified benefits such as connectivity with Christian peers, ease of accessing biblical teaching, and online mentorship. However, they also described difficulties such as peer pressure, moral confusion, and the influence of secular ideologies. These insights underscore the necessity of the church's continued presence in digital spaces and its role in equipping youth with critical tools for handling faith in a networked society.

Finally, traditional roles and methods of faith formation remain central in the life of the church. Preaching, sacraments, catechism, mentorship, and structured youth activities continue to provide a strong foundation for faith formation among young people. These methods offer theological grounding, moral instruction, and communal belonging. Yet, the data also reveals that traditional methods must advance to remain relevant. Young people desire more interactive, dialogical, and responsive methods that speak to their present-day realities. They appreciate the value of tradition but also seek innovation that resonates with their daily lives.

In conclusion, the experiences of young people in the RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation reflect a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, structure and freedom, and local rootedness and global connection. Faith formation in a networked society demands that the church listens attentively to young people, embraces new tools responsibly, and rethink its methods without losing its theological core. This chapter affirms that the faith of young people is alive, thoughtful, and eager to grow, provided the church accompanies them with wisdom, openness, and courage.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a detailed interpretation of the empirical findings gathered through focus group discussions, church leader interviews, and digital observations (e.g., the RCZ Kaunda Square Facebook page and youth WhatsApp groups). The purpose is to deepen the understanding of how young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia experience faith formation in the context of a network society and the role of the church. Drawing from thematic analysis, this chapter explores both the opportunities and challenges young people face in growing spiritually within this dynamic cultural and technological environment.

In orientation with Osmer's (2008:10-13) model of practical theological interpretation, this chapter primarily engages the Interpretive Task and Normative Task, which seeks to answer the questions: *"Why is this going on?"* and *What ought to be going on?* The chapter seeks to make sense of recurring patterns, contradictions, and deeper meanings observed in the data by integrating further ideals from theology, intercultural studies, youth ministry, and digital culture.

Furthermore, this chapter not only interprets the themes that developed from the fieldwork, such as the influence of technology, intergenerational gaps, and youth agency in spiritual growth but also situates these insights within the broader structure of scholarly discourse on faith formation. Literature from authors such as Root, Smith, Grenz, Steven Emery-Wright, and Muriithi is used to support and critically engage the findings. Ultimately, this chapter lays the foundation for the next phase of practical recommendations, that are addressed in the chapter that will follow.

### **5.2 A Missiological Potential for Global and Local Faith Formation**

In modern society, shaped by technology, spiritual connections among young people develop into transformative opportunities for faith formation. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 highlights how technology is not only an optional tool but an important environment where Christian faith can be nurtured, expressed, and shared in new and meaningful ways. Scholars such as Root, Smith, and Grenz emphasize that digital platforms create opportunities for relational connection, theological engagement, and communal participation that transcend traditional geographical and cultural boundaries. These understandings point to technology's reflective Missiological potential, enabling the church's mission to be both global, connecting

believers across the world, and local, engaging individuals within their unique cultural and social contexts.

The empirical findings from the Reformed Church in Zambia, especially from the Kaunda Square Congregation, demonstrate how this Missiological potential is actively realized in the lived experiences of young people. Chapter 4's data reveals that Kaunda Square congregation young people incorporate technology into their spiritual lives through social media, WhatsApp groups, and online worship services, among other platforms. These digital spaces are not minor but central to their faith formation, providing opportunities for worship, discipleship, community-building, and pastoral care. This empirical evidence shows how technology acts as a bridge that connects local faith realities with the wider global Christian community.

Roberto (2018, 76-78), the transformation of technology in society presents reflective faith formation. This presents the church with missiological opportunities for rethinking how faith formation takes place. In today's networked society, learning and spiritual growth are no longer only confined to specific times or physical locations, however, they are now mobile, and accessible anytime and anywhere. Digital technologies empower the church to extend its teaching and discipleship beyond traditional structures, engaging believers anytime through smartphones, tablets, and other connected devices. Roberto (2018, 76-78). This shift opens up vast possibilities for the mission of the church, as high-quality digital content ranging from sermons, podcasts, videos, apps, and interactive platforms can be used to reach and disciple individuals across diverse contexts. Furthermore, digital media allow for contextualized and personalized learning, accommodating various learning styles and intelligence, and making faith formation more inclusive and adaptive. Roberto (2018, 76-78). From a missiological perspective, this expansion of access and flexibility enables the church to engage with new generations, respond to their spiritual hunger in culturally relevant ways, and embody Christ's presence in the digital spaces where young people live and seek meaning.

### ***5.2.1 Global Missiological Potential***

The global aspect of technology's Missiological potential is outstanding. As discussed in Chapter 2, digital networks promote "borderless" communities of faith where believers from various cultural and denominational backgrounds can interact, learn, and grow together. (Echano, 2016:78-90). Through these platforms, the church becomes a global family, reflecting the biblical vision of a faith community that transcends national and cultural boundaries (Matthew 28:19).

The global aspect of technology's missiological potential is outstanding. As discussed in Chapter 2, digital networks promote "borderless" communities of faith where believers from various cultural and denominational backgrounds can interact, learn, and grow together (Grenz, 2000; Root, 2007). Through these platforms, the church becomes a global family, reflecting the biblical vision of a faith community that transcends national and cultural boundaries. This has significant implications for faith formation: it means that spiritual growth is no longer confined to one local context or tradition. Instead, young people, such as those in the RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation, can engage with a broader body of Christ, learning from diverse theological voices, worship expressions, and lived experiences. Such exposure deepens their understanding of the Christian faith, promotes intercultural sensitivity, and cultivates a more global and missional imagination. In this way, digital connectivity not only expands access to faith resources but also reshapes how faith is formed in a networked society.

In the Zambian context, young people's engagement with global Christian content, such as sermons from international preachers, online Bible studies, and Christian music from various parts of the world, enhances their spiritual formation. They gain access to a wealth of theological perspectives and worship styles, enriching their faith and expanding their understanding of Christianity's universal nature. This global connectivity equips the RCZ's youth to participate in the global body of Christ actively, strengthening their sense of belonging to a worldwide faith community.

Moreover, technology facilitates real-time communication and collaboration between churches and believers across continents. This interconnectedness opens new missional horizons for the RCZ, enabling partnerships, resource sharing, and collective prayer movements that intensify the church's witness on a global church. Thus, technology not only extends the church's reach but also deepens its unity and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission, possibly enlarging the target group of faith formation to include global Christianity. While the local church remains primarily responsible for the formation of its own youth, it must now also prepare them to engage meaningfully with the wider body of Christ in a globally connected faith community.

### ***5.2.2 Local Missiological Potential***

While the global aspect is important, the Missiological potential of technology is also deeply local and context-specific. The literature stresses the importance of contextualization in mission, where faith formation must resonate with the lived realities of local communities

(Muriithi Ndereba, 2021). The empirical data from the RCZ Kaunda square reveals that technology serves as a powerful local resource for young people in their congregation, allowing them to integrate their faith with their cultural identity and daily lives.

Digital platforms become spaces where young people negotiate meaning, express their spirituality, and connect with their church community beyond the physical walls of the shelter. For example, WhatsApp groups created by church youth ministries enable continuous fellowship, mentorship, and pastoral care, promoting an energetic faith community reachable from home or anywhere. This ongoing connection among young people helps sustain spiritual growth and accountability, particularly in a context where physical church attendance may be challenged by economic or social factors.

Technology also supports local theological reflection and dialogue by providing access to biblical resources and platforms for discussion. Young people engage critically with their faith, ask questions, and share insights in digital forums that respect their cultural experiences and language. (Roberto 2018, 28). This empowers them as theological agents, actively shaping their faith journey within the church's life. Such engagement enhances the church's mission to form mature disciples who are rooted in their context yet open to the universal Christian tradition.

Additionally, technology allows the congregation to reach marginalized or geographically isolated young people who might otherwise be disconnected from faith-formation activities. Online sermons, prayer meetings, and Christian education programs provide inclusive opportunities for participation, helping to overcome barriers of distance and social exclusion. This inclusivity reflects the incarnational nature of the church's mission: to be present and active in all spheres of life, meeting people where they are. (Roberto 2018, 28).

In conclusion, the integration of technology and spirituality among young people in Kaunda Square Congregation presents an opportunity for missional potential. The RCZ has the potential to embrace digital spaces as arenas of faith formation by empowering young people, equipping leaders, and grounding digital engagement in the church. (Roberto 2018, 78). Doing so will allow the church to continue participating more in the mission, not only in church and Sunday services, but also in status updates, live streams, and group chats, where the Spirit is already at work. (Echano, 2016:78-90).

### **5.3 Youth as Theological Agents: Child Theology and Contextual Theology in Practice**

The recognition of youth as theological agents represents an important shift in how the Reformed Church in Zambia, understands its ecclesial and Missiological task in a networked

society. Central to this reorientation is the theory of child and youth theology, which affirms that young people are not simply passive learners but active participants in constructing theological meaning. In similar way, contextual theology emphasises that theology must be shaped within the realities of lived experience.

Child theology and children's theology, while closely related, offer somewhat different emphases. Child theology often reflects adult interpretations of children's spirituality, while children's theology, and by extension, youth theology, centers the voices, questions, and meaning-making processes of young people themselves. (Sonnenberg & Nagel-Herweijer 2024, 30). This theology affirms children and youth as spiritual subjects and primary theological actors. When applied to youth in the RCZ Kaunda Square congregation, this outline challenges traditional adult-centric models of theological instruction, emphasizing instead that young people are co-creators in the life and faith of the church.

Contextual theology as articulated by (Bevans 2002, 70) becomes vital. Bevans argues that theology must develop from dialogue with the specific cultural, social, and political realities of the people. In Zambia, young people are shaped by unique conditions: rapid urbanization, high youth unemployment, shifting cultural values, and the pervasive influence of digital technology. If the RCZ Kaunda Square congregation is to remain relevant in this developing landscape, it must adapt its theological methods to reflect and engage these realities.

Chapter 4 of this thesis provides empirical evidence of this contextual dynamic. Young people in the Kaunda Square Congregation revealed how they engage theologically through WhatsApp groups, TikTok videos, digital devotionals, and communal youth fellowships. These expressions reflect a form of lived theology, rooted in daily experience and cultural context. One participant proclaimed, *"Stop telling us that one day we will lead. We are leading now. In small ways. Train us, trust us, walk with us."* This is not just a call for participation, however, it is a theological statement asserting their spiritual agency in the present.

This kind of agency is in line with Bevans' (2002, 70) that theological structures must be flexible and open to the cultural influences that shape human identity and belief. Rather than resisting these changes, the church must listen to young people's voices and respond with theological practices that are meaningful in their digital, communal, and often economically constrained worlds. As Echano, (2016:78-90). argue, the theology that connects authentically with local culture results in deeper faith formation. Contextualization, then, is not dilution, it



is the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh in the specific reality of young people of the Kaunda Square congregation.

Theologically, when youth engage with Scripture, prayer, and ethics through their digital platforms and cultural idioms, they are participating in contextual theology. Their use of WhatsApp to share devotions, or their TikTok reflections on Bible verses, constitutes an organic theologizing process, one that is peer-led, examining, and rooted in their lived realities. As Root (2007) and Muriithi Ndereba (2021) stress, young people are not preparing to be the church of tomorrow, they are the church of now. Their expressions of faith, through lament, praise, questioning, and storytelling, are legitimate contributions to the broader theological discourse.

For the RCZ, this presents both an invitation and a responsibility. Faith formation must be more than a transfer of doctrinal content; it must be a dialogical, contextualized process that treats young people as collaborators. The church must develop theological spaces, both physical and digital, where youth can explore Scripture, doctrine, and ethical questions in light of their contexts. Co-led Bible studies, youth-led worship, and contextual preaching that speaks to urban life, digital culture, and economic insecurity are just a few examples of how the church can affirm and equip youth as theological agents. (Smith and Snell, 2020: 256).

In conclusion, recognizing young people as theological agents, through the understanding of child and youth theology as well as contextual theology, is not simply an instructional but a deeply missiological one. The RCZ Kaunda Square Congregation must not view young people as a future priority alone; they are a vital part of the church's present mission and theological life. By adapting its theological teachings to be contextually grounded and by elevating the voices of young people in the theological discourse, the RCZ can faithfully nurture a generation that is spiritually engaged, theologically active, and missional empowered.

#### **5.4 The Need for Fragments, but Also the Danger of Fragments: Challenges and Opportunities**

In a networked society, young people live and grow in a world shaped by digital fragmentation. These fragments provide opportunities and the ability to engage with faith in flexible, personalized, and accessible ways. However, the nature of these fragmented encounters also poses dangers, such as superficiality, disorientation, and a loss of theological depth. For the Reformed Church in Zambia, particularly within the Kaunda Square Congregation, the faith formation of youth must be understood within this dynamic of both opportunity and risk.

#### ***5.4.1 The Opportunities: Access, Flexibility, and Digital Agency***

As described in Chapter Four, youth participants noted the positive role of digital media in sustaining spiritual engagement throughout the week. YouTube sermons, Bible apps, Christian TikToks, and WhatsApp devotionals provide immediate access to relevant and contextual faith content. These experiences confirm Steven Emery-Wright's (2017) argument (Chapter Two) that digital platforms serve as legitimate spaces for meaning-making, community, and spiritual reflection. Participants in the focus groups articulated how such content helps them feel spiritually nourished even outside formal church settings.

Moreover, these digital fragments are in line with the adaptive times of young people's lives. As reflected in the data, listening to sermons while commuting or scrolling through Scripture posts between school activities has become normative. This validates Muriithi's (2021:131) emphasis (Chapter Two) on African youth as active agents who creatively appropriate digital tools for spiritual formation. The use of WhatsApp for prayer chains, Scripture sharing, and testimonies at Kaunda Square demonstrates the formation of digital Christian micro-communities among RCZ youth.

#### ***5.4.2 The Dangers: Distraction and Disorientation.***

Participants in Chapter Four expressed concern about the digital environment's distractions and contradictory messages. Many admitted to being drawn away from devotions by other content or struggling to screen theological messages from various online sources. This echoes the concerns raised by Campbell & Garner, (2016:78). in Chapter Two, who cautions that fragmented and decontextualized digital content can lead to theological confusion and shallow faith. Smith's (2005:67) view of faith as socially constructed adds weight to these observations, as youth are continually influenced by competing online ideologies.

A recurring theme in the focus groups was the pressure to perform spirituality online. Young people felt compelled to present a curated image of faith, comparing themselves to others who seem more "spiritual" on social media. This performative tendency reflects Roberto (2015:56) analysis, where identity in the networked world is often shaped by visibility and external affirmation rather than internal transformation.

In conclusion, both empirical findings (Chapter Four) and the literature reviewed (Chapter Two), it is evident that the networked society presents a double-edged sword for youth faith formation. The RCZ must embrace digital fragmentation as a missional opportunity while being mindful of the theological, relational, and spiritual risks it entails.

Rather than resisting digital fragments, the Church is called to hold them together, weaving them into a rational narrative of Christian formation that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to present-day realities. This includes developing theological literacy among youth, promoting embodied mentorship, and creating hybrid discipleship spaces where both digital and physical expressions of faith are integrated. Campbell & Garner, (2016:78).

Through intentional pastoral presence, intergenerational dialogue, and context-aware strategies, the RCZ can become a community where young people are supported in navigating their spiritual journeys amidst the complex realities of a networked society.

### **5.5 Evaluating Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation in the Church: An Ecclesial Task Perspective**

Traditional roles and methods of faith formation are both appreciated and actively discussed by young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia, particularly within the Kaunda Square Congregation. These include preaching, catechism, sacraments, mentorship, and youth programs such as Bible study groups and choirs. Young people view these practices as formative and meaningful, often identifying them as foundational to their growth in faith. However, when evaluated from the perspective of the ecclesial task of faith formation, a more nuanced picture emerges, one that affirms tradition while calling for greater responsiveness to the realities of a networked and digitally immersed society. (Roberto, 2015:76).

From an ecclesial standpoint, the church's role is not just to preserve doctrinal heritage or transmit beliefs, but to form persons and communities of faith in ways that are theologically rooted, spiritually nurturing, and contextually responsive. As explored in Chapter Two, the church as a faith-forming community is called to facilitate not only instruction but also encounter, participation, and transformation (Roberto, 2015:76). This calls into question whether the RCZ's current emphasis on traditional methods alone is sufficient to carry out its ecclesial task effectively in the lives of young people.

Empirical findings from Chapter Four show that young people deeply value practices such as preaching, with many citing sermons as central sources of guidance, encouragement, and biblical instruction. One participant stated, "Real-life situations help me know how to live as a Christian," underscoring the potential of contextual preaching. However, there was also concern that some sermons remain disconnected from pressing issues that dominate youth lives, technology, sexuality, politics, and mental health. This suggests a gap between traditional practice and the ecclesial task of forming faith that speaks to lived experience.

Catechism, too, plays an important role, particularly in grounding youth in Reformed theological identity. Yet the limited dialogical space within many catechism classes, as noted by participants, raises concerns about whether this method truly promotes critical and engaged faith. The ecclesial task of faith formation involves not only teaching what to believe but also cultivating the capacity to wrestle with belief in the community. The longing for “more time to talk and ask questions,” as expressed by one youth, highlights the need for ecclesial spaces of reflection, not just instruction.

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper continue to serve as powerful moments of spiritual belonging, offering visible and communal expressions of divine grace. These rites anchor young people’s identities in the broader body of Christ. (De Kock and Sonnenberg, 2016:195–198). From an ecclesiological perspective, sacraments symbolize covenant and form a sacramental imagination, a way of seeing the world through God’s presence. However, these moments risk becoming ritualized rather than transformational without interpretive and participatory accompaniment. (De Kock and Sonnenberg, 2016:195–198).

Mentorship and intergenerational relationships were repeatedly emphasized in Chapter Four as deeply impactful. This aligns strongly with the ecclesial vision of the church as a relational community of formation, where older believers walk with younger ones in discipleship. As one participant affirmed, “My elder always checks on me. That makes me feel cared for.” This relational model reflects the communal theology of African Reformed traditions, where faith is seen as a journey shared across generations. Here, traditional roles, when relational and intentional, are fulfilling the church’s formative calling. Roberto (2018,28) notes that the congregations that prioritize intergenerational ministry tend to have a significant influence on the faith development and long-term commitment of young people. In such congregations, youth are not only passive recipients but are actively welcomed, involved, and expected to contribute across various dimensions of church life, worship, teaching, fellowship, outreach, and even leadership and decision-making processes.

Within the RCZ, particularly at Kaunda Square Congregation, young people have expressed a desire for deeper relational engagement with adults in the church. When intergenerational bonds are promoted, young people experience the church as a safe and nurturing community, where their energy, questions, and developing faith are not only accepted but valued. (Roberto 2018, 28). These settings encourage organic interactions, such as informal conversations before and after services, which help establish trust and care. Young people begin to perceive God not

as an abstract idea but as a living reality encountered through authentic relationships within the Christian community. (Roberto 2018, 28). Through the faithful witness of intergenerational relationships, youth are drawn into a vibrant and participatory experience of the gospel. Such multigenerational engagement creates overlapping spheres of spiritual influence and guidance, reinforcing the communal and relational nature of Christian faith formation in a networked and changing cultural landscape.

Traditional youth structures such as choirs and Bible study groups also provide avenues for leadership and moral accountability. However, several participants noted that these programs can become predictable or disconnected from their digital and social realities. “Sometimes it’s the same things again and again,” one youth noted. If these spaces fail to evolve, they risk becoming institutional routines rather than vital communities of formation.

When viewed through the lens of the church’s ecclesial task, it becomes evident that traditional roles and methods in the RCZ have much to offer but also face limitations. The church is called not only to conserve but also to cultivate, helping young people integrate their faith within a rapidly changing and often fragmented world. As theologians like Emery-Wright (2017) and Muriithi (2021) suggest, faith formation in the digital age must be dialogical, participating, and contextually grounded.

## **5.6 Summary**

Chapter Five provided a critical evaluation of the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia, particularly Kaunda Square Congregation, in the faith formation of young people in a networked society. Drawing on core themes, technology and spiritual connection, youth as theological agents, opportunities and challenges in a networked society, spiritual growth, and traditional methods, the chapter integrated empirical findings with theological insights.

The evaluation showed that while traditional methods of preaching, catechism, sacraments, and youth programs remain important to young people, these are not always responsive to their lived realities in a digital, network world. Technology offers new opportunities for engagement, but the Church’s integration is still limited. Moreover, young people increasingly seek relevance, dialogue, and recognition as theological contributors.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This final chapter offers a combination of the research findings and presents key recommendations for practice and future research. The study searched to understand the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in the faith formation of young people within a networked society and how this role may be evaluated from the perspective of the ecclesial task of faith formation. Drawing on empirical research conducted at Kaunda Square Congregation, supported by a review of relevant literature and theological structures, the chapter reflects on the significance of the findings for the RCZ Kaunda Square congregation and similar ecclesial contexts. In addition, the chapter includes a brief reflection on the research process, the researcher's positionality, and what has been learned through this study.

### **6.2 Summary of Key Findings**

This research was guided by a central question: What is the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in the faith formation of young people in a networking society, and how can this role be evaluated from the perspective of the ecclesial task of faith formation? Chapter Four presented empirical findings from focus group discussions with the young people and interviews with church leaders. Chapter Five discussed the findings and provided a missiological evaluation of the data by engaging with the interpretive and normative task and answering the questions Why is this going on and What ought to be going on? The key findings can be summarised as follows:

1. **Spiritual Growth and the Stages of Faith Formation:** Young people in the RCZ Kaunda Square congregation experience faith formation primarily through structured church activities such as preaching, catechism, sacraments, and youth programs. These traditional channels are valued for their grounding in Reformed theology and communal identity. However, young people also expressed the need for more space to ask questions, express doubt, and relate their spiritual journey to real-life experiences. Spiritual growth is not linear and requires pastoral attentiveness to different stages of faith development.
2. **Technology and Spiritual Connection:** Digital technology considerably influences the faith lives of young people. Social media, online sermons, and digital Bible applications are used not just for personal formation but as tools for building community. Despite the positive engagement with digital tools, young people also noted challenges such as distractions,

misinformation, and the lack of theological guidance online. The RCZ has yet to fully embrace the missiological potential of technology in faith formation.

3. Youth as Theological Agents: The study affirmed that young people are not passive recipients but active participants in constructing theological meaning. This is in line with the structures of child and youth theology and contextual theology. Young people articulated theological reflections in response to real-life issues such as technology, politics, sexuality, and mental health. However, RCZ Kaunda Square structures have not consistently created space for their voices, limiting their agency in ecclesial and theological processes.

4. Opportunities and Challenges in a Network Society: The networked society presents opportunities for youth ministry that exceeds physical and denominational boundaries. Yet it also introduces challenges such as individualism and fragmentation. Young people are exposed to multiple sources of authority and interpretation, which can enrich or dilute faith. The church must respond with intentional strategies that affirm its theological identity while engaging meaningfully with network society.

5. Traditional Roles and Methods of Faith Formation: Traditional roles, such as preaching, catechism, sacraments, mentorship, and youth fellowships continue to play a vital role in the faith formation of young people. However, their effectiveness depends on contextualisation and openness to innovation. While these roles provide theological stability, they risk becoming irrelevant if they do not reflect the lived experiences and questions of young people in a digital, globalized world.

### **6.3 Theological and Missiological Implications**

The findings of this study have both theological and missiological implications. Theologically, they affirm the importance of Reformed ecclesiology while pointing to the need for more participating and dialogical forms of ministry. Youth are not just “the church of tomorrow,” but are integral to the church of today. A full-bodied theology of youth participation is essential for holistic faith formation.

Missiological, the study calls for a renewed understanding of faith formation that includes the digital, global, and network dimensions of today’s society. The church’s mission must respond to the realities of connectivity, diversity, and mobility. The RCZ, and churches in similar contexts, are challenged to see digital platforms not as threats but as opportunities for expanding witness and discipleship. The digital transformation of society demands a

theological rethinking of the church's presence, teaching, and relational practices in the 21st century.

This study critiques the limits of the current church order, which often regards digital engagement as peripheral rather than central to ecclesial mission. Faith formation in a network society must be rethought not simply as internal nurturing but as a public witness, a missiological task that calls the church to form disciples who can engage critically and faithfully in the digital age.

In conclusion, the study argues that while the RCZ's traditional foundation provides stability and identity, its faith formation practices must develop to meet the spiritual, relational, and networking realities of today's young people. An ecclesial response will require a balance between preserving theological heritage and promoting adaptive, participating, and contextually grounded approaches to faith formation.

#### **6.4 Contributions to Knowledge and Practice**

This research contributes to knowledge in several ways;

It affirms the role of youth as theological agents and offers an empirical grounding for their inclusion in theological reflection and ecclesial processes.

It highlights the dual nature of technology, as both a challenge and a missional opportunity, in youth faith formation.

It provides a contextualized case study of the RCZ Kaunda Square congregation that can inform broader conversations on youth ministry in Reformed church in Zambia.

It offers practical insights into how traditional methods of faith formation can be revitalized through participation, contextualization, and digital integration.

#### **6.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and evaluation, the following recommendations are offered to the RCZ Kaunda Square congregation and churches in similar settings:

##### **6.5.1 Reformulating the Ecclesial Task of Faith Formation in the RCZ**

According to the by-laws and procedures (Constitution/Church order) of the Reformed Church in Zambia, (BP 57.1, 2013:65), the church holds the responsibility for the "instruction of the young people in the Christian faith through catechism, youth fellowship, and regular pastoral guidance." This clearly establishes faith formation as a key mandate of church leadership and



congregational life, emphasizing instruction through traditional means. However, the empirical findings from this study suggest that while these traditional practices remain foundational, they are insufficient to fully address the complex realities faced by young people growing up in a network and digital society.

The church's current focus on instruction needs to be broadened and sharpened to incorporate a more holistic understanding of faith formation, one that goes beyond mere transmission of doctrine to embrace relational, participatory, and contextual dimensions. The research shows that young people are not passive recipients but active theological agents who seek spaces to express, explore, and construct faith meaningfully. At the same time, digital technologies have become a significant influence, offering both opportunities and challenges that the church cannot afford to ignore.

Therefore, it is recommended that the RCZ consciously reformulates its ecclesial task to reflect these realities. This would involve integrating digital tools and platforms as part of faith formation strategies, promoting dialogical and interactive catechesis, and intentionally creating safe, inclusive spaces for youth leadership and theological engagement. Such a renewed focus would empower the church to nurture spiritual growth that is deeply connected to the lived experiences of young people, equipping them to navigate the complexities of faith in a globalized, networked context.

In summary, reformulating the task of faith formation in the RCZ means preserving the rich theological heritage of the Reformed tradition while adapting and innovating methods and approaches to meet the missiological demands of the 21st century. This renewed ecclesial vision will enable the church to remain relevant, vibrant, and transformative in the lives of young people today and into the future.

## **6.5 For Further Research**

Building on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following areas are recommended for further research to support the ongoing development of faith formation in the Reformed Church in Zambia, particularly within the context of a networked society:

### **6.5.1 Develop a Missiological Theology of Technology**

As digital culture continues to shape young people's faith experiences, the RCZ would benefit from further research that explores a Reformed theology of technology. Such theological reflection could help the church to discern how digital tools and platforms may be faithfully

integrated into spiritual formation, communal worship, and mission without compromising theological identity.

### **6.5.2 Deepen Exploration of Youth as Theological Agents in the RCZ**

This research has shown that young people are not merely passive recipients of theological knowledge but active contributors to the shaping of faith within their communities. Further studies should investigate how the RCZ can develop intentional models for recognizing and nurturing youth as theological agents. This could involve exploring youth participation in sermon development, liturgy, community outreach, and digital content creation. Such inquiry would emphasize the ecclesial role of young people as co-creators in the theological and missional life of the church.

### **6.6 Reflection on the Research Process**

Conducting this research has been both a theological journey and a deeply personal pilgrimage. As a scholar, I have gained skills in empirical research and theological evaluation, learning to integrate qualitative data with doctrinal reflection. As a minister, I have been reminded of the complexity and richness of youth faith formation and the urgent need for pastoral approaches that are both rooted and responsive.

This thesis has challenged my assumptions, particularly regarding the adequacy of traditional methods in a rapidly changing world. I have come to appreciate the voices of young people as indispensable in the construction of theology and the shaping of ecclesial missions. Their questions, insights, and critiques must not be seen as threats, but as gifts to the church.

As a theologian, I have grown in my understanding of contextual theology, not as a simple method but as a vocation of attentiveness to the Spirit's work in culture, community, and daily life. The process has taught me to hold together tradition and innovation, structure, doctrine, and dialogue.

### **6.7 Limitations of the Study**

While this study has offered valuable insights into the faith formation of young people in the Reformed Church in Zambia, Kaunda Square congregation within a network society, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations do not reduce the value of the research but rather indicate areas where findings should be interpreted with attention and where future studies could extend the conversation.

### **6.7.1 Contextual Scope**

This research focused specifically on the Kaunda Square Congregation of the RCZ, which, although a significant urban congregation, represents only a small part of the broader RCZ. Therefore, while the findings offer deep contextual insights, they may not fully reflect the experiences of youth in rural or differently-situated congregations across Zambia.

### **6.7.2 Sample Size and Diversity**

The empirical data was drawn from focus groups with youth and interviews with church leaders. While this provided rich qualitative information, the sample was limited in size and scope. The voices of disengaged youth or those no longer active in church life were not included, which may have offered contrasting perspectives on faith formation.

### **6.7.3 Researcher Positionality**

As a minister within the RCZ and a theological researcher, my dual role may have influenced how participants engaged with the research and how their responses were interpreted. Although reflexivity and critical self-awareness were applied throughout, the interpretive nature of qualitative research means some degree of subjectivity is inevitable.

### **6.7.4 Remote and Online Data Collection**

Due to logistical constraints, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted online. While this allowed for flexibility and broader participation, it also posed limitations. Internet connectivity issues, lack of privacy in home settings, and technological discomfort among some participants may have affected the depth and flow of conversations. Non-verbal cues were sometimes difficult to observe, potentially affecting the quality of interaction and data interpretation.

### **6.7.5 Language and Translation Nuances**

Discussions and interviews were conducted in a combination of English and local languages. Although careful attention was given to transcription and translation, subtle meanings, expressions, or cultural nuances may have been lost or altered in the process.

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## **Appendix A: Participants Statement Consent Form**

### **Research Study Title:**

**Rethinking the Role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in Faith Formation of Young People within a Networking Society. A Case of Kaunda Square Congregation in Lusaka District.**

### **Name of Principal Investigator:**

Michael Lungu

Master's Candidate, Protestant Theological University (PThU)The Netherlands.

Email:mlungu@student.pthu.nl

### **Name of Supervisor:**

Prof. Ronelle Sonnenberg, Protestant Theological University (PThU)The Netherlands.

Email:

### **Purpose of the Study:**

This study aims to investigate the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in the faith formation of young people in a networking society where social networks and online communities significantly influence spirituality.

### **What Will Happen During the Research:**

You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview (via phone, Zoom, or WhatsApp). The interview will focus on your experiences, views, and reflections on faith formation and the role of the RCZ in a networking society. With your permission, the interview may be audio-recorded for accurate analysis.

### **Duration of Research/Interview:**

The interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes.

The focus group will last approximately 90 minutes.

### **Voluntary Participation:**

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time without any consequences.

### **Confidentiality and Data Storage:**

All information you provide will remain confidential. No identifying details will be included in the research report. Data will be stored securely and only available to the researcher. Audio recordings and transcripts will be deleted after the research is complete and the results are finalized.

**Use of the Data:**

The data collected will be used for academic research purposes only, including the writing of a master's thesis and possible presentations or publications. Your identity will be kept unknown in all materials.

**Risks and Benefits for Participants:**

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. While you may not receive direct benefits, your input will contribute to understanding and improving faith formation among young people in the RCZ in the networking society.

**Consent to Record:**

Do you consent to the interview being audio-recorded for research purposes?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**Right to Ask Questions:**

You are free to ask questions at any time during or after the interview. For questions or concerns, you may contact the principal investigator or the supervisor (see details above).

**Consent to Participate**

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you have been informed about the nature of the study, your rights as a participant, and how your data will be used. You voluntarily agree to participate in the research/study.

**Participant's Statement of Consent**

I, the undersigned, confirm that I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the interview and consent to the recording of the interview for research purposes.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Focus Group / Interview Questions**

- 1. Faith Formation:** How would you describe your personal journey of faith as a young person in the RCZ? What does “faith formation” mean to you personally? What experiences in the church have helped you grow spiritually?
- 2.** What are some opportunities that you think the networking society offers for your spiritual growth?
- 3. Networking society:** What is networking society according to you, and how has it influenced your faith formation?
- 4. Influences on Faith Formation:** What roles do the church in your faith?
- 5. Challenges in Faith Formation:** What difficulties do you face in maintaining and growing your faith in today’s networking society? What opportunities are there in networking that can your faith? How can the church better support young people in their faith formation within a networking society?
- 6.** Do you have any other thing to say on the topic of “Rethinking the Role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in Faith Formation of Young People in a Networking Society”?

Thank you for your time and cooperation

God bless you.

## **Appendix C: / Interview Questions for Church Leaders**

### **Research Questions**

- 1. Church's Role in Faith Formation:** How do you understand your role as a church leader in the faith formation of young people in the networking society?
- 2.** What is the role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in the faith formation of young people within a networking society?
- 3. Church Strategies:** What approaches has the RCZ implemented to support the faith formation of young people in a networking society?
- 4. Theological Reflection:** How do you balance traditional faith formation methods with the realities of a networking society?
- 5.** Do you have any other thing to say on the topic of "Rethinking the Role of the Reformed Church in Zambia in Faith Formation of Young People in a Networking Society"?

Thank you for your time and cooperation

God bless you.