



**Recreation and Christian Youth Ministries:
The Ottawa Chapter of the Greek Orthodox Youth of America**

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Abstract

The Ottawa (Canada) Chapter of the Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA) has existed since the mid 1900s. At that time, GOYA was viewed as an organization pertinent not only for the practice and maintenance of a religious minority (Greek Orthodoxy) in mainstream Canada, but also as a social recreational organization for interaction of the limited few Greeks that dwelled in Ottawa. Today, the primary purpose of the Ottawa Chapter of GOYA remains the same and consistent to the original mission as established by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOAA) – that is - a youth ministry based on *Liturgia* (worship), *Koinonia* (fellowship), *Diakonia* (service), and *Martyria* (witness). Historically, recreation activities in the form of retreats and cultural/religious seminars have traditionally been used to address the mission of GOYA and to recruit new members in GOYA. Administrators of GOYA and the HCO have acknowledged recreation as a useful means to not only endorse the mission of GOYA, but to also solicit membership through activities such as cultural dances, basketball tournaments, and ice skating outings. This paper depicts the relationship between recreation and Christian youth ministries for the implementation of the mission of the Ottawa Chapter of GOYA. A model has been constructed to depict the relationship between recreation and Christian youth ministries from an organizational context. This paper concludes with suggestions for administrators of GOYA and other Christian Youth Ministries for the use of recreation to help implement their mission and ministry, as well as suggestions for the potential use of recreation to aid in membership growth.

Keywords: Christian Youth Ministries; Greek Orthodox Church; GOYA (Greek Orthodox Youth of America); Recreation

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Introduction

In the 20th century, the relationship between religion and recreation were explored both in theory and practice. In the early part of the 20th century, *The Lord's Day Alliance of Canada*, a lay organization affiliated with the Presbyterian Church established an objective to combat the secularization of the Sabbath. Specifically, *The Lord's Day Alliance of Canada*, focused on integrating religion and recreation while endorsing Sunday as a day of pause. This effort by *The Lord's Day Alliance of Canada*, went a long way in lobbying the decision makers of Canada, in particular the government of Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier to introduce the Lord's Days Act in 1906 (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2009).

Throughout the 20th century and up until the present, Sunday is still very much considered a family day, a day of religion and/or recreation in Canada. The commercial recreation industry in Canada has developed to some extent out of the opportunities offered by Sunday – the day of pause (Karlis, 2004). Commercial recreation activities and events such as sporting events, bowling, golf and family picnics have become popular family and social activities that are engaged in on Sundays. Moreover, Sundays have also become popular days for Church recreation activities that have followed or preceded Divine Liturgies. These Church recreation activities include social gatherings, seminars and presentations, luncheons, and Church picnics.

During the 20th century, the link between religion and recreation as organized activities was not always viewed as being positive. Joseph Pieper (1952) in his classic text entitled, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* posits that leisure is a contemplative, meditative spiritual state where we discover God and our purpose of existence. Pieper (1952) goes on to state that leisure is not sports and games and organized recreation activities. Is this to say that organized recreation activities, in particular Church recreation activities, cannot enhance our understanding of God and our spirituality? Perhaps, yet Peiper focused on “leisure”, and “leisure” may be more closely linked to state of mind than “recreation” which focuses on activities.

In a textbook edited by Heintzman and Van Andel (2006) a number of issues on leisure and Christianity in pluralistic society were addressed such as Biblical and

Historical Perspectives; Methodological Issues; Present Practices and Challenges in Leisure; Play, Sport, and Athletics; and Leisure and Culture. The area of youth, recreation and religion is largely overlooked in this textbook, particularly from a Christian Ministry perspective. Recent research that focuses on youth, recreation and religion explore the impact of activities and experiences (i.e., camping and faith-based recreation activities) on youth development (Barnett and Weber, 2009; Henderson, Oakleaf and Bialeschki, 2009; Yust, 2006; Sweatman & Heintzman, 2004). The relationship between recreation and Christian Youth Ministries has been largely overlooked in research. Most of the information that we do have on the relationship between recreation and Christian Youth Ministries is not scientific but comes from websites that talk about how recreation activities are used as a part of Christian Ministries to attain ministry goals.

The Greek Orthodox Church in Canada is one that has emphasized the relationship between recreation and religion, particularly from a youth perspective. An emphasis has been placed by the Greek Orthodox Church of Canada on promoting religion throughout recreation opportunities that focus on youth. Recreation has been viewed as a way to bring youth closer to the Church while also keeping youth active within the Church while also fulfilling the mission of the Church (Karlis, 1993b). Church recreation has traditionally been examined as an area within the field of leisure studies (Mobley, 1975) however little emphasis has been placed on the church recreation pursuits of youth that are a part of Christian Youth Ministries. This paper purports to contribute to the limited research that exists on recreation and Christian Youth Ministries.

The Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA)

The Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA) is a Christian ministry group with origins from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOAA). GOYA is under the auspices of *The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries* of the GOAA, however each Greek Orthodox church that is a part of the GOAA is responsible for the operation and provision of its GOYA services, including the election and administration of its executive council.

Up until 1996, the mandate of the GOAA included the Greek Orthodox churches of Canada. On September 24, 1996, Bishop Sotirios of Toronto was elevated to Metropolitan Sotirios of Toronto (Exarch of all Canada) and thus the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto, Canada (GOMTC) was established. GOYA, having roots in the United States of America, continued to exist and continues to exist within the Greek

Orthodox churches of Canada during and after the creation of the GOMTC. Indeed, similarly to the GOAA, the GOMTC has a central *Youth Office* that oversees the ministry activities of Greek Orthodox youth.

The Ottawa Chapter of GOYA has existed since the mid 1900s. During GOYA's formation, European immigration to Canada was peaking, as many teenagers and young adults of Greek descent made Ottawa home. At that time, GOYA was viewed as an organization pertinent not only for the practice and maintenance of a religious minority (Greek Orthodoxy) in mainstream Canada, but also as a social recreational organization for interaction with the limited few Greeks that dwelled in Ottawa.

Today, the primary purpose of the Ottawa Chapter of GOYA remains the same and consisted to the original mission established by the GOAA – that is - a youth ministry based on *Liturgia* (worship), *Koinonia* (fellowship), *Diakonia* (service), and *Martyria* (witness). Specifically, the recreation activities of GOYA are designed and implemented in a fashion to address its original mission. Recreation activities in the form of retreats and cultural/religious seminars have traditionally been used to address the mission of GOYA. Yet, recreation plays a key role in not only implementing the Ottawa Chapter of GOYA's mission, but also in the recruiting of members in GOYA. One of the biggest challenges of GOYA today is sustaining membership. The Hellenic Community of Ottawa (HCO) has entered into the second and third generation thus leading to cultural integration into mainstream society and less interaction/awareness of GOYA. Administrators of GOYA and the HCO have acknowledged recreation as a useful means to not only endorse the mission of GOYA, but to also solicit membership through activities such as cultural dances, basketball tournaments, and ice skating outings.

Youth, Recreation and the Greek Orthodox Church

The Greek Orthodox Church has its name from the fact that the Greek was the first language of the ancient Christian Church from which Greek Orthodoxy is based. That is, early followers of Christ not only wrote in Greek, but the New Testament was also written in Greek. Although the word "Greek" can refer to people originating from Greece, it also identifies people who originated and are followers of the Greek speaking early Christian Church (Stephanopoulos, 2009).

The following statement provided by Reverend Stephanopoulos (2009: 1) is perhaps the best way to describe the Greek Orthodox Church:

“The Orthodox Church today is a communion of self governing Churches, each administratively independent of the other, but united by a common faith and spirituality. Their underlying unity is based on identity of doctrines, sacramental life and worship, which distinguishes Orthodox Christianity. All recognize the spiritual preeminence of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople who is acknowledged as *primus inter pares*, first among equals. All share full communion with one another. The living tradition of the Church and the principles of concord and harmony are expressed through the common mind of the universal episcopate as the need arises. In all other matters, the internal life of each independent Church is administered by the bishops of that particular Church. Following the ancient principle of the one people of God in each place and the universal priesthood of all believers, the laity share equally in the responsibility for the preservation and propagation of the Christian faith and Church.”

The last sentence of Reverend Stephanopoulos’ statement depicts the value placed by the Greek Orthodox Church on the people (laity) for maintaining and spreading the Christian faith and Church. Of course, the laity are not clergy, they are people who are not ordained, yet share in the responsibility of endorsing and spreading Christianity. One means used by the laity to endorse and spread Christianity is through the creation of ministries, such as Christian Youth Ministries.

Research conducted by Karlis (1993a: 1987) on youth of Greek descent found that a preference to participate in Greek Orthodox services and Greek cultural recreation activities existed amongst youth. That is, a link between religion and recreation that was found to exist for members of this ethno-cultural group, with culture appearing to be a link between the two. Subsequent research conducted by Chimbos (1980) postulates how youth (the children of Greek immigrants) face greater challenges in maintaining their ethnic cultural religion and ethno-cultural specific recreation activities. Horna (1987) takes this one step further by arguing that immigrants and their children go through a re-socialization process in which they become integrated into the cultural activities of the mainstream society. Research such as the aforementioned justifies the importance of ethno-specific recreation for the maintenance of ethno-cultural religion, language and recreation pursuits. Christian Youth Ministries that are a part of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Canada are thus faced with an added challenge to their established mission – the preservation of ethnic cultural identity.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between recreation and Christian youth ministries, specifically the Ottawa (Canada) Chapter of GOYA. This study purports to examine: (1) the role recreation plays in achieving the mission of GOYA, (2) the impact recreation has on membership recruitment in GOYA, (3) the importance of recreation for GOYA membership maintenance, and (4) recreation's role in cultural and religious maintenance.

The results of this study are presented through a model constructed to depict the relationship between recreation and Christian youth ministries from an organizational context. This paper concludes with suggestions for administrators of Christian Youth Ministries such as GOYA for the use of recreation to help carry out its mission and ministry, as well as suggestions for the potential use of recreation to aid in membership growth.

Methodology

The methodology used to collect data consisted of multiple methods of data collection, including the review of secondary data resources such as the internet, community documents, and archives documents. Primary data was collected through a series of one-on-one interviews conducted with four out of the five individuals who served as GOYA (Greek Orthodox Youth Association) senior Advisors from 2000 to the present. The average age of the GOYA Advisors interviewed was 23 years of age, and all Advisors interviewed were former GOYA members.

All interviews were conducted in English as all Advisors of GOYA identified English as their primary language. A series of questions were asked to each of the three advisors interviewed. The interviews consisted of questions that focused on the mission of GOYA and the role recreation plays to fulfill the mission of GOYA. Specifically, respondents were asked questions on *Liturgia* (worship), *Koinonia* (fellowship), *Diakonia* (service), and *Martyria* (witness) and the role recreation plays in helping fulfill each of these areas of GOYA's mission. Respondents were also asked questions on the impact recreation have on the recruitment and maintenance of members in GOYA. Furthermore, respondents were also asked to provide their thoughts on the relationship between culture, religion and recreation.

Interview questions consisted of a combination of closed and open ended questions. Closed ended questions that were asked included: (1) Do you feel that *Koinonia* is achieved through the recreation activities offered by GOYA? (2) How often

are GOYA recreation activities held? And (3) Who participates in GOYA recreation activities?

Open ended questions were asked with the intent of finding out as much information as possible from the Advisors in respect to the actual relationship between recreation and the fulfillment of the objectives of GOYA. Open-ended that were asked included: (1) Do you feel that recreation plays a key role in fulfilling the mandate of GOYA?, (2) How does recreation relate with *Diakonia*?, and (3) What process is used by GOYA to link recreation with religion? (4) What role (if any) does recreation play in the recruitment of new members in GOYA?, and (5) What role (if any) does recreation have on the maintenance of members in GOYA?

The feedback provided by respondents was transcribed and recorded. Following the interview, data collected was compared and contrasted according to questions asked, and commonalities and differences were identified and recorded. When clarification was needed the respondents were contacted once again by the researcher to provide further information.

Results

The results were recorded and transcribed according to the four categories identified as the objectives of this study: (1) mission, (2) recruitment, (3) maintenance, and (4) culture. Below are the transcripts of the information that was provided from the respondents that were interviewed.

Mission

It was found that recreation activities offered by GOYA are designed and implemented in a fashion to address its original mission, that is, *Liturgia* (worship), *Koinonia* (fellowship), *Diakonia* (service), and *Martyria* (witness). The by-laws of this organization are centered around the four attributes of the mission statement. All activities, events and recreational experiences are thus catered to addressing the stated mission of this organization. Moreover, the planning, organizing and implementation of recreation activities take into consideration the achievement of the organization's mission. Below is an excerpt of what the respondents had to say in respect to the role recreation plays in fulfilling the mission of GOYA.

- “We always try to put religious and social recreational activities together...rarely do we experience religious or social recreational activities on their own.”
- “Recreation activities are designed to address GOYA's mission.”
- “For the most part, planning recreation activities takes into consideration how and in what way the stated missions of the organization can be achieved.”
- “The primary intent of engaging in recreation activities is to fulfill the objectives of the mission of GOYA.”
- “I think if there was not a recreational incentive to have the youth together, than there wouldn't be a GOYA. Our group is motivated not only about the religious aspect of GOYA but of the types of things we do when we are not doing philanthropic activities.”

Recruitment

Recreation was found to play a key role in the recruitment of new GOYA members. All respondents commented on how it is important to attract members and that recreation seems to provide a positive initial appeal that opens the door for involvement. Recreation is viewed as being the initial point of contact for new members. Furthermore, recreation was seen as being what members' first see and become attracted to while being introduced to GOYA. Respondents that were interviewed had the following to say about recreation and its role on the recruitment of new members in GOYA.

- “Recreation is the driving force for membership recruitment-for example if there was no recreation potential new members (especially the younger one's) would not be attracted to GOYA.”
- “Everybody enjoys participating in recreation activities...so, recreation activities are an obvious choice when it comes to membership recruitment.”
- “Youth want to be with their peers, they connect with their peers through recreation. Recreation is what will attract them to become members in GOYA.”
- “Recreation, on many occasions, has been what has brought members into this organization.”
- “I believe it is because of the recreation activities we have fellowship in GOYA. The more people hear about what things we do in GOYA (recreational side) the more people are interested in joining.”

- “It is the motivational role of our members. It is always easier to say what it is we want to do rather than plan fundraisers. When we first meet with the executive to plan the year, we always do the recreational aspects first and then look into how the religious, serve and witness aspects fit in.”

Maintenance

It was found that recreation is a powerful tool in keeping members active. The recreation activities offered by GOYA were found to provide a powerful appeal to members particularly when it came to the enhancement of active involvement. The respondents, all former GOYA members commented on how “looking forward” to participating in the organized recreation activities of GOYA kept them interested and active within this organization. The recreation opportunities offered by GOYA were identified as being appealing to members, particularly the younger members of GOYA. The respondents had the following to say about recreation’s role in sustaining involvement in GOYA.

- “If all GOYA activities were purely religious oriented – no recreation – only a few of the senior members would participate, we would not have any younger members (13-16 years of age).”
- “Recreation not only helps introduce one to GOYA it helps keep one interested and involved in GOYA.”
- “Recreation is the connector that brings us together and keeps us together while helping us fulfill common interests.”
- “Involvement is enhanced through enjoyable recreational pursuits, and recreation activities are enjoyable.”
- “If we didn’t offer a recreational aspect in GOYA I think it would be very difficult to keep our members. There are so many factors now at play in the lives of teenagers and we need to appeal to our members interests.”

Culture

It was found that the social opportunities offered by GOYA helped in the maintenance and preservation of ethnic culture. The Greek group is an ethno-religious group with 99% of Greeks being Greek Orthodox. Thus, religion and culture go hand-in-hand, which means that religion and recreation are closely linked. Respondents identified the cultural recreation focus of GOYA to be “ethno-cultural-religious” and that

recreation activities are a key resource to provide and maintain GOYA as an “ethno-cultural-religious” organization. Through GOYA recreation activities that are cultural specific and catered towards cultural and religious maintenance are offered. Below is an excerpt of what respondents identified as the GOYAs impact on culture and its relationship to religion and recreation.

- “The recreation and religious activities of GOYA help reinforce our cultural identity as Greek Orthodoxy and Greek national identification go together.”
- “The recreation activities provided by GOYA make you feel more “Greek” and help you build a sense of belonging in Greek culture and with other Greeks.”
- “GOYA is an organization that is built around ethnic culture and religion – the two come out in the recreation activities it offers.”
- “By participating in GOYA recreation activities you become more aware and understanding of Greek Orthodoxy and Greek culture, particularly the relationship between the two.”
- “It is important to note that before any outing, Father Alex will say a prayer, if we are at a weekend getaway then we will have a talk with Father Alex where the members are asked to participate in an open forum. This serves as a means to learn about our culture and religion and helps with the Greek cultural identity. When we visit other parishes we meet with the GOYA (they host, or we host) and we plan various recreational/philanthropic events to get to know each other and will then do a talk/conference or attend church together. This helps bring the community together and reinforce the Greek culture/community of our members.”

While providing the above stated information, GOYA Advisors listed a number of recreation activities that GOYA has offered both within the physical boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Hellenic Community and outside the physical boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Hellenic Community. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of the recreation activities that were mentioned by GOYA Advisors.

Table 1. GOYA Recreational Activities.

Within (Internal) Physical Boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Hellenic Community:

Cultural Dances
Caroling
Lectures
Seminars
Retreats/Getaways
Fundraisers (Coffee Hours, Bake Sales)
Monastery/Archdiocese Trips
Conferences (i.e. Clergy Laity Conference)

Outside (External) Physical Boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Hellenic Community:

Basketball Tournaments
Ice Skating Outings
Bowling Tournaments
Fundraisers (Car Washes, Bake Sales)
Scavenger Hunt on the Rideau Canal
Dodge ball Tournaments

Recreation and Christian Youth Ministries: The Development of the Theoretical Model

From the aforementioned results, the following is concluded: (1) recreation is a way to practice and become aware of the mission of GOYA, (2) recreation is an avenue used to recruit members to GOYA and to also maintain members in GOYA, and (3) recreation is a means used to practice and become aware of Greek Orthodoxy, Greek culture and the link between the two. Illustration 1 presents a model that has been constructed to help visualize the results of this study and the relationship between recreation and Christian Youth Ministries as depicted by the GOYA example.

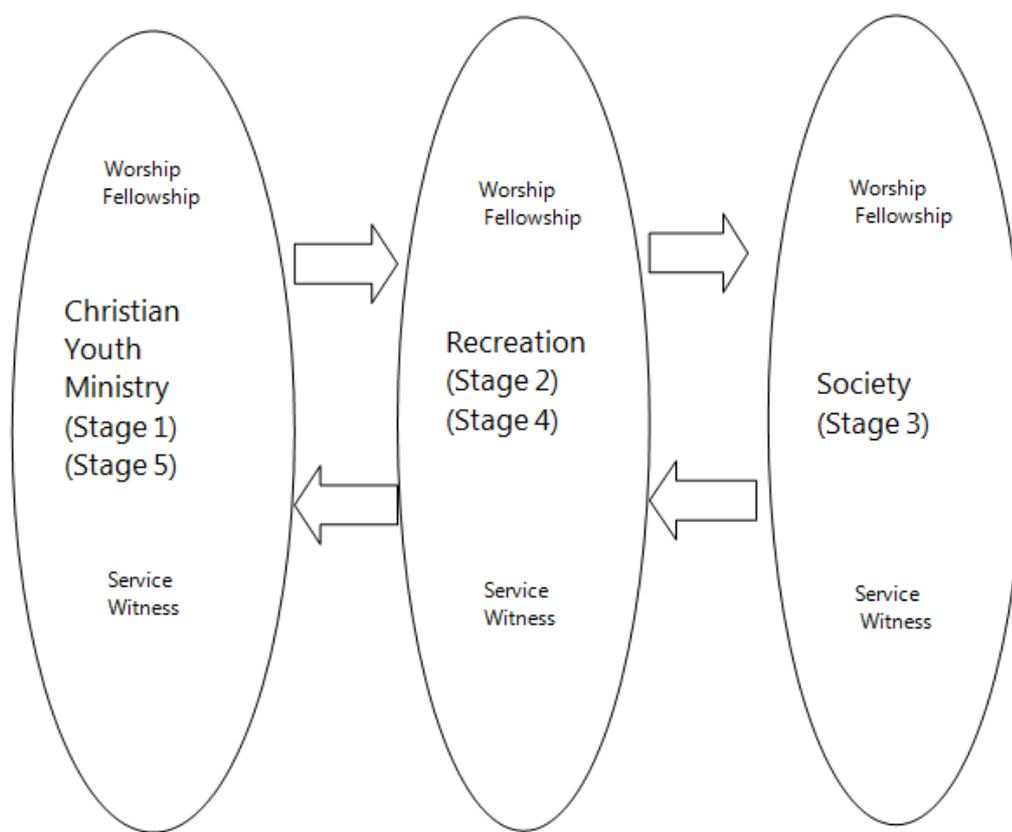


Figure 1. A Model of the Relationship between Recreation and Christian Youth Ministries.

This model describes Christian Youth Ministries as being the foundation in which recreation activities are established. That is, the mission of Christian Youth Ministries, in the case of GOYA for example, centers on *Liturgia* (worship), *Koinonia* (fellowship), *Diakonia* (service), and *Martyria* (witness) (Stage 1). It is based on this stated mission that recreation activities offered by GOYA are designed and implemented (Stage 2). These recreation services are offered within the physical boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and its Hellenic Community of Ottawa (HCO) (i.e., seminars and retreats). In Stage (3) recreation activities and opportunities of the Christian Youth Ministry (GOYA) are exposed to society as these activities (i.e, bowling tournaments, bake sales, mission seminars and workshops) take place outside of the physical boundaries on the Greek Orthodox Church and HCO. It is in Stage 3 where external exposure leads to the recruitment of new members.

Although Stage 3 may be viewed as a terminal stage, it can also be a stage of commencement as – in the case of GOYA – Stage 3 is often the point when new

members are recruited. Activities such as bowling tournaments and skating have aided in attracting new members. Once integration of new members takes place, new members tend to become involved in recreation activities offered by GOYA in the physical boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the HCO (Stage 4). Stage 5 follows Stage 4 as by this point new members have become a part of the Christian Youth Ministry.

It is important to note that the results of this study found that some, not all new members become attracted to the Christian Youth Ministry (GOYA) initially through recreation. Although it is evidently clear by the model that recruitment takes place during Stage 3, it should also be noted that recruitment also takes place during Stage 4, as some new members become aware and attracted, interested and join to participate in the recreation activities (i.e., seminars, retreats) that are offered within the physical boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the HCO.

In sum, this model can be viewed as a cyclical one with recreation playing a pivotal role in its continuous pattern. Although the model commences at Stage 1, it does not end at Stage 5 as Stage 5 merges with Stage 1 which is ultimately followed by Stage 2 and so on. Since recreation activities continue to be offered regularly by GOYA – both within the physical boundaries of the Greek Orthodox Church and the HCO – this model is on-going as it continues, through recreation activities, to recruit new members and maintain existing membership. Thus, recreation is shown to play a key role in Christian Youth Ministries such as GOYA for fulfilling mission statements and mandates.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Administrators of GOYA in Ottawa

The results of this study indicate that recreation may be useful in fulfilling the mission of Christian Youth Ministries. In the case of GOYA, recreation activities are planned, created and implemented with *Liturgia* (worship), *Koinonia* (fellowship), *Diakonia* (service), and *Martyria* (witness) in mind. Recreation is thus a tool to promote and endorse the mission of GOYA within and amongst its members. Thus, it is the established mission of GOYA that has led to the creation of and provision of GOYA's recreation services.

This study has illustrated that recreation may assist in recruitment and maintenance of members by Christian Youth Ministries such as GOYA. Recreation activities assist in exposing GOYA to society thus attracting new members to this

Christian Youth Ministry. The recreation activities offered by GOYA also aid in keeping members involved and attracted to this organization.

It is concluded that a relationship exists between recreation and Christian Youth Ministries, particularly when it comes to the fulfillment of the mission of Christian Youth Ministries. Administrators of Christian Youth Ministries may thus benefit through an enhanced awareness and understanding of the potential of recreation to benefit both the membership body - in terms of level of satisfaction; and the Christian Youth Ministry as an organization- in terms of membership recruitment and sustainment. To aid in enhancing this understanding, the following suggestions are put forth for administrators of Christian Youth Ministries.

Suggestion 1: Recognize the potential of recreation.

Christian Youth Ministry administrators would benefit from a recognition of the potential of recreation to increase membership, sustain membership, and to fulfill the mission of the ministry. Recreation is a tool that can be designed, catered and implemented around the mission of the Christian Youth Ministry. As a result, recreation is a helpful tool or aid in building awareness, guiding and directing the Christian Youth Ministry to fulfill its mission.

Suggestion 2: Encourage participatory involvement in the decision-making process through recreation planning.

People like being a part of decisions that affect them. Recreation activities are people-oriented thus participatory democracy in planning the types of activities offered makes prospective participants feel good and important while addressing collective needs (Fowler and Cohoon, 2002/2003). In the case of Christian Youth Ministries with set missions, little involvement takes place by participants when it comes time to determine the mission of the organization. Recreation in the form of activities is a way for Christian Youth Ministries to achieve stated objectives while allowing people a chance to plan recreation activities to achieve mission objectives.

Suggestion 3: Endorse the value of recreation.

Recreation activities have been found to assist individual and community development, enhance social functioning and improve quality of life (National Recreation Statement, 1987). That is, the potential and benefits of recreation are endless both from

an individual, group and community (organization) perspective (Hutchison & McGill, 1992). Administrators of Christian Youth Ministries would do justice to their organizations by first realizing the values of recreation and endorsing it through the administration of the services provided in their respective Christian Youth Ministries. Not only would their organizations benefit, the members of their respective organizations would benefit as well.

Final Thoughts

In the case of GOYA, this Christian Youth Ministry is unique as it is one that is a part of an ethno-cultural specific group. The recreation activities of this Christian Youth Ministry not only fulfill religious needs but also ethno-cultural interests as well. Results of this study revealed that recreation acts as a link between religion and culture. However, it should be noted that more research is needed to articulate if a link can be generalized to exist between religion and culture, and recreation and Youth Ministries as this study focused only on one Youth Christian Ministry consisting of a small number of respondents – GOYA Advisors. Future research would benefit from surveys of members of youth ministries such as GOYA and research from Advisors and participants of other Youth Christian Ministries. The model presented in this study may act as a conceptual and theoretical framework for future research.

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