



RAISING CATALYTIC YOUTH LEADERS

A Church- and Ministry-Based Model for Discipleship, Leadership, and Protection in Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Zambia has one of the youngest populations in the world, creating both an opportunity and a responsibility for churches and Christian ministries seeking to form the next generation. This ministry case study presents a church- and ministry-based model developed through the Zambia Youth Ministry Network (ZAYOMINET) and its advocacy arm, Voice of the Voiceless. The model combines biblical discipleship, leadership and entrepreneurship training, mentorship through real ministry responsibility, and youth protection through safe-space practices. Drawing on ministry records, training activity, participant observation, and reported outcomes from partner churches and communities, the article describes how this model has been implemented in Lusaka, Luanshya, Masaiti, and related ministry settings. Reported outcomes for January-September 2026 include 140 young people completing discipleship and leadership formation, five partner churches adopting youth-protection policies and safe-space strategies, and participants moving into practical ministry leadership. The article argues that youth leadership formation is not an optional programme at the margins of church life but a biblical, pastoral, and social responsibility. It concludes with recommendations for churches, denominations, ministry partners, and public institutions seeking to strengthen youth discipleship, protection, skills, and responsible leadership in Zambia.

Keywords: youth ministry; discipleship; leadership; child protection; Zambia; church; mentorship; entrepreneurship; ZAYOMINET

1. Introduction

The Church in Zambia stands at an important demographic and pastoral moment. Zambia Statistics Agency reports that the 2022 Census of Population and Housing recorded a national population of 19.6 million, with a median age of 18.3 years and approximately 63 percent of the population below the age of 25. These figures confirm that Zambia is a markedly youthful

society. For churches, this demographic reality is not merely a statistic. It raises a practical question: how will young people be disciplined, protected, equipped, and entrusted with meaningful responsibility?

Many churches value young people but do not always possess intentional structures for long-term discipleship and leadership formation. Youth may participate in worship, choirs, sports, or occasional programmes while receiving limited preparation for biblical leadership, service, advocacy, vocational responsibility, or the protection of vulnerable peers. The result can be a gap between church participation and mature Christian formation.

This article presents a ministry model developed through the Zambia Youth Ministry Network (ZAYOMINET), established in 2009-2010, and Voice of the Voiceless, an advocacy initiative that works particularly with vulnerable children and street-connected young people. The model has been used in leadership training, discipleship, evangelism, mentorship, poverty-reduction initiatives, and youth advocacy. Its central conviction is simple: young people should not be treated only as future members of the Church. They are persons made in the image of God who can be formed, protected, trusted, and equipped for faithful service now.

2. Biblical and Theological Framework

The model rests on four related theological convictions. First is the *imago Dei*. Genesis 1:27 locates human dignity in creation itself: every child and young person bears the image of God. Christian ministry with young people must therefore begin with dignity, love, protection, and respect rather than merely with institutional recruitment.

Second is the discipleship mandate. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commands his followers to make disciples and to teach them to observe what he commanded. Discipleship is consequently more than attendance at church activities. It involves formation in Scripture, character, prayer, service, witness, and responsibility. Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 4:12 also refuses to treat youth as a disqualification from meaningful Christian example: young believers are called to model speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Third is the biblical concern for vulnerable people. Psalm 82:3 calls God's people to defend the poor and fatherless, while Isaiah 1:17 joins faithful religion with the pursuit of justice and protection of the oppressed. A youth ministry that develops leaders while ignoring abuse, exploitation, unsafe environments, poverty, or exclusion would therefore be incomplete.

Fourth is intergenerational transmission. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 portrays faith as something taught deliberately across generations and embedded in daily life. Titus 2 similarly assumes that mature believers have a formative responsibility toward younger members of the community. Leadership development is therefore not simply the transfer of skills; it is the transfer of Christian wisdom, character, and responsibility through relationships.

3. Ministry Context and Organisational Background

ZAYOMINET was established in 2009-2010 and is registered under Certificate of Registration No. ORS/102/66/5560. Its ministry includes youth-leader training, evangelism, discipleship, poverty-reduction initiatives, and the formation of Christian leaders and entrepreneurs. Voice of the Voiceless, established later as an extended arm of this work, focuses particularly on advocacy for vulnerable children, street-connected children, and people whose needs may otherwise remain unheard.

The model described here has been shaped through years of ministry practice rather than through a single short-term intervention. Training activities supplied for this case study include youth-leadership programmes in Luanshya and Lusaka, including training at Luanshya Baptist Church on 18-19 July 2025, Kandulwe in Masaiti District on 23 October 2025, and Lusaka on 25

April 2026. Five churches are counted as partner churches because of their continuing relationship with the ministry rather than because of one-off attendance at an event.

This practical history matters because sustainable youth ministry depends on relationships. Programmes can gather young people for a day; formation requires repeated contact, trusted mentors, local church participation, and opportunities to practise what has been taught.



Figure 1. Rev. Charles Mwape facilitating leadership training at CBTO, Lusaka, 25 May 2024. Photograph by Blessings Mwape, ZAYOMINET media team.

4. Methodology: The ZAYOMINET Model

This article is presented as a ministry case study. It draws on organisational records, documented training activities, ministry observation, participant testimony, and reported outcomes from ZAYOMINET and partner churches. It does not claim to be a controlled experimental evaluation. The purpose is to describe a reproducible ministry framework, report the outcomes currently documented by the organisation, and identify areas in which more systematic future evaluation would strengthen the evidence base.

The model operates through four interconnected pillars.

Pillar 1 - Biblical Discipleship. Young people participate in a twelve-week curriculum addressing identity in Christ, Bible-study practices, Christian calling, and discipleship. Weekly small-group meetings led by trained mentors are intended to move formation from occasional events into sustained relationships.

Pillar 2 - Leadership and Entrepreneurship Development. Monthly training sessions equip young people in leadership and practical responsibility. Entrepreneurship is included because Christian formation takes place within the economic realities of communities. Leadership is approached not merely as holding a title but as developing the capacity to serve, organise, communicate, take responsibility, and contribute constructively to church and society.

Pillar 3 - Mentorship and Responsibility. Participants are paired, where possible, with pastors, youth leaders, deacons, or other mature Christian mentors. Young people are then given real responsibilities such as Sunday school, peer counselling, outreach, Bible-study leadership, and

other ministry tasks. The underlying principle is that leadership must be practised, not only discussed.

Pillar 4 - Youth Protection and Safe Spaces. In collaboration with churches and ministries, ZAYOMINET promotes youth-protection policies and strategies for safer, more accessible ministry environments. Protection is treated as foundational to leadership development. Young people cannot be expected to flourish spiritually or exercise responsible leadership where abuse, intimidation, exploitation, or unsafe practices are ignored.



Figure 2. ZAYOMINET leadership team during the Annual General Meeting, Sunbeam Lodge, Masaiti, 15-18 December 2023. Photograph by Natasha, ZAYOMINET media team.

5. Findings and Ministry Fruit

According to ZAYOMINET's internal ministry records for January-September 2026, 140 young people completed discipleship and leadership formation and were serving in ministry-related roles. Five partner churches adopted youth-protection policies and safe-space strategies. These figures should be read as organisationally reported ministry outcomes rather than as independently audited impact measures, but they provide a useful indication of the scale and direction of the work.

A participant example illustrates the intended progression from formation to responsibility. Evans, a 21-year-old participant described by the ministry as previously shy and isolated, entered discipleship and mentorship and subsequently began leading a Bible study for ten younger boys at Miswa Primary School. The significance of this example is not simply numerical. It illustrates the model's aim to move a young person from passive participation toward service, confidence, and responsibility for others.

The ministry's photographic record also demonstrates continuity across different forms of engagement: leadership training, research-group discussions, annual leadership gatherings, gospel outreach, and youth sport. These activities suggest that youth formation is being pursued through several social settings rather than through classroom instruction alone.



Figure 3. ZAYOMINET gospel outreach with young people at Lwampesa, Masaiti, October 2023. Photograph by Davies, ZAYOMINET media team.

6. Discussion

Three lessons have emerged from the ministry's experience. The first is that young people often grow when they are trusted with meaningful responsibility. Mentorship without responsibility can remain abstract; responsibility without mentorship can become unsafe or discouraging. Bringing the two together allows young leaders to practise service while remaining accountable to more experienced Christians.

The second lesson is that protection precedes sustainable leadership. Churches rightly desire confident young leaders, but confidence is difficult to cultivate where young people do not feel safe, heard, or respected. Child- and youth-protection policies are therefore not administrative additions to ministry. They are part of the Church's responsibility to honour the dignity of those entrusted to its care.

The third lesson concerns the need for tools and training. Pastors and youth workers may have strong commitment but limited access to structured curricula, formal biblical training, safeguarding resources, or leadership-development materials. This concern is consistent with wider youth-ministry scholarship, which has long emphasised theological grounding, ministry goals, shared ownership, mentoring, and professional growth in work with young people.

The model also faces limitations. Funding remains a constraint, follow-up is demanding, and generational or cultural barriers can restrict the degree of responsibility entrusted to younger leaders. The present evidence is primarily ministry-generated. Future development should therefore include clearer participant tracking, standardised pre- and post-training measures, safeguarding audits, documented mentor feedback, and longer-term follow-up of participants. Such measures would not replace the ministry's theological purpose; they would help demonstrate more carefully what forms of formation produce durable outcomes.

7. Recommendations

Churches should establish intentional discipleship pathways that combine biblical formation, mentorship, real responsibility, and clear youth-protection practices. Youth ministry should be integrated into the life of the congregation rather than treated as an isolated programme.

Denominations and church networks should consider training at least one capable youth mentor in each congregation and providing continuing theological and safeguarding formation for those who work with children and young adults.

Ministry partners should support the development of contextualised curricula, mentor training, safeguarding resources, and sustainable follow-up systems. Financial support is valuable, but durable partnerships should also strengthen local capacity rather than create dependency.

Public institutions and civil-society partners should recognise that youth development includes both formal students and out-of-school young people. Skills formation, employability, entrepreneurship, protection, and community participation can complement the spiritual and relational formation provided by churches and ministries.

8. Conclusion

Zambia's youthful population presents the Church with a substantial responsibility. The question is not whether young people will shape the future, but how they will be formed before they assume greater responsibility in churches, families, communities, and public life.

The ZAYOMINET model offers one practical response. Its combination of discipleship, leadership and entrepreneurship development, mentorship, responsibility, and protection seeks to form young people as whole persons rather than as programme participants. The reported outcomes are encouraging, while the limitations point toward the need for stronger documentation and longer-term evaluation.

The central theological claim remains straightforward: raising and protecting young leaders is an expression of Christian discipleship. The voice of the voiceless and vulnerable must be heard, and one way the Church can help make that possible is by forming young people who know Scripture, understand responsibility, serve others, and are prepared to lead with courage, integrity, and compassion.

Notes and Sources

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