

## **Students' Involvement in Church Activities and their Values Formation**

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### **Abstract**

Church involvement is a type of civic engagement that gives various benefits to students particularly in developing and nurturing values. This study determined the students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. The descriptive-correlation design was adopted and the survey questionnaire was distributed to 320 college students of Misamis University, Philippines. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ) was used to explore the correlation between students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. Findings revealed that students were sometimes able to attend church and their involvement to church activities was moderate. Overall, the values exhibited by students were well-developed. However, looking into each of the values, it appears that composure/peace and tolerance/adaptability were only adequately-developed. There was a statistically positive correlation between students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. The findings of this study may be used by the school in formulating plans that foster church involvement and values formation.

**Keywords:** civic, composure, correlation, plans, tolerance

## Introduction

The church is considered as an important institution in the society. Like other institutions, it has its specific function that is capable of influencing every life of an individual. Apparently, a church is quite inseparable from religion. Indeed, religion serves as a structure for many individuals that can affect their way of perceiving things around based on their religious beliefs (Creedon, 2015). Recently in the United States, it was estimated that 74% of the worldwide population cite religion as an important part of their daily life (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Furthermore, over two-thirds of adults acknowledge some connection to religion, such as belief in a higher power, religious influence on family of origin, personal prayer and devotion, or attendance of religious services and ceremonies (Miller & Thoreson, 2003). Religious participation in Asia and America is driven with higher self-esteem, greater positive effect, and the presence of meaning in life (Davis & Kiang, 2016). Hence, it is primarily useful to consider how this institution is viewed and the particular impact it might give to people.

Church involvement is necessary in order to fully realize what a church can do and be able to do. One student organization worth examining is the religious student organization. According to Weber et al. (2016), it was revealed that there is positive relationship between involvement in a religious organization and the development of being socially responsible on the part of the students. In some areas, motivation is one of the various factors that influences students' journey.

College transition could present circumstances that make the students find no or less time to attend the church (Melleby, 2008). Dropout from church among teens and young has also been shown by Stetzer (2014) but of those who left, almost two-thirds return and currently attend church. The young adults are not primarily leaving because they are expressing disagreements with the religious doctrines or some rebellion. They simply lose track of the church and stop seeing it as important to their life.

The idea of student involvement in church activities is one of the most widely researched components of education that has been connected to positive educational results in college students.

Involvement of students most often denotes participation in extra- or co-curricular activities. However, student involvement connotes more than simply participating in a club or attendance in a campus athletic event (D'Arcy, 2014). Involvement seems to be much more complex construct where students decide where they will devote their cognitive, emotional, and physical energies (Winsett et al., 2016). This involvement is anchored on Astin's Theory of Involvement (Astin 1993, 1999) which was built based from the Input-Environment-Outcome theory. For student growth to take place, Astin puts emphasis on the concept that students must actively engage in their own environment. In that sense, it is understood that students should utilize and take full advantage of all the resources provided by educational institutions in order to become personally developed through both interaction and integration.

Many universities have started to support religious and spiritual involvement as part of a student's holistic development. In fact, youth ministry is executed intentionally in order for adults to impact the adolescent world with the gospel and help foster them into becoming spiritually mature adults (Kaiser, 2015). People who exhibit high levels of religious involvement tend to report higher levels of self-control than respondents who exhibit low levels of religious involvement (Pascoe, 2016).

In the Philippines, there were studies done about the involvement of students in religious activities (Francisco, 2010; Baring et al., 2016; Cornelio, 2016). However, in Ozamiz City, Philippines, there has been no study conducted pertaining to students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. Hence, this study aimed to explore the students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. The specific objectives are to determine the church attendance and involvement of college students and their values formation, and to determine if there is a correlation between the variables. The findings of this study may be used by the school in formulating plans that foster church involvement and values formation.

## Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Misamis University, Ozamiz City, Philippines employing the descriptive-correlational research design and survey method with the use of a validated questionnaire with a reliability value of 0.79. The respondents were the 320 third year and fourth year college students who were Roman Catholics (161), Protestants (154) and Islam followers (5). Of this number, 175 were female and 145 were male. These year-levels were selected because of the possibility that the students may already have longer exposure to religious activities by being members of church organizations. The respondents were asked to fill out the informed consent to confirm their voluntary participation in the research after explaining to them the scope of the study, the anonymity of their identification, and their right to refuse participation. All of the target students agreed to become the respondents of the study.

The questionnaire has three sections. Section 1 consists of nine church activities common to all respondents regardless of their religious affiliation. These activities are the following: chapel services, spiritual retreat, weeks of prayer, youth of society, religious concerts, prayer meetings, music groups, conferences, and night vigil. The students were to indicate their responses for each activity with regard to their attendance and involvement. The five-point Likert scale was used to measure the students' responses (for attendance/involvement), as follows: 1 – Never/No involvement; 2 – Rarely/Low involvement; 3 – Sometimes/Moderate involvement; 4 – Very often/High involvement; 5 – Always/Very high involvement. Section 2 consists of statements that depict value sets such as courtesy, harmony/friendship, respect, fairness, grit/determination, helpfulness/care, fearlessness/selflessness, learning/openness, self-awareness/sensitivity, involvement/community, composure/peace, tolerance/adaptability. The students were to indicate their response for each statement to show to what extent their values have been developed or formed in themselves. The five-point Likert scale was used to scale the students' responses, as follows: 1 – Very poorly-developed; 2 – Poorly-developed; 3 – Adequately-developed; 4 – Well-developed; 5 – Very well-developed.

The weighted mean based on their responses was computed and scaled with the following range:

- 4.20-5.00 – Always/Very high involvement; Very well-developed
- 3.40-4.19 – Very often/High involvement; Well-developed
- 2.60-3.39 – Sometimes/Moderate involvement; Adequately-developed
- 1.80-2.59 – Rarely/Low involvement; Poorly-developed
- 1.00-1.79 – Never/No involvement; Very poorly-developed

The standard deviation was calculated to determine if the perceptions of the respondents vary. The Pearson Product Moment Method (Pearson r) was computed for correlation analysis.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Students' attendance and involvement in church activities***

Table 1 shows the attendance and the extent of involvement of students in church activities. Chapel services can provide space for worship that aids spiritual growth (Goddard, 2016). Also, some of the messages of speakers may change the life of college students in various ways. Misamis University is holding a mass service every Friday, and attendance of students has been observed with more involvement as choir members. In this study, chapel services obtained the highest weighted mean which implies that MU students have been more involved in chapel worship.

Spiritual treatment is also a religious activity that helps spiritual coping for students in time of distress (Meisenhelder et al., 2016). College students with high levels of religious involvement and commitment report better emotional and mental health than those with little or no involvement (Fleischer, 2004). The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an international Christian ecumenical observance (Rumsey, 2016). It is an octave, that is, an observance lasting eight days. Traditionally the week of prayer is celebrated between 18-25 January, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul. Churches in the southern hemisphere, where January is a vacation time, often find other days to celebrate it, for example around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for unity.

The Youth of Society provides a structure for the youth to spread God's words. An alternative form of religious expression is religious concert wherein music is used as a medium to express one's spirituality (Moberg, 2009; Young, 2012; Dyrness & Syeed-Miller, 2014). Prayer meeting is another religious activity that manifests fellowship. It is a religious gathering of God's believers for worship and prayer (Raymond, 2012). Sharing and praying together may help others avoid "bottoming out" in their spiritual lives. Prayer meetings are either held in schools, in huge spaces, or in the houses (Francisco, 2010).

**Table 1. Attendance and involvement of college students in church/religious activities.**

Religious activities	Church attendance			Extent of involvement		
	WM	SD	Remarks	WM	SD	Remarks
Chapel services	3.38	1.0788	Sometimes	3.18	1.0616	Moderate involvement
Spiritual treatment	3.27	0.9833	Sometimes	3.21	0.9375	Moderate involvement
Weeks of prayer	3.16	1.0743	Sometimes	3.23	1.1432	Moderate involvement
Youth of Society	3.14	1.1336	Sometimes	3.17	0.9238	Moderate involvement
Religious concerts	3.13	1.0929	Sometimes	2.94	0.9968	Moderate involvement
Prayer meetings	3.12	1.0860	Sometimes	3.12	1.0051	Moderate involvement
Music groups	3.03	1.1249	Sometimes	3.06	1.0562	Moderate involvement
Conferences	3.01	1.0914	Sometimes	3.02	1.0782	Moderate involvement
Night vigils	2.95	1.0522	Sometimes	2.83	1.0246	Moderate involvement
<b>Overall weighted mean</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>3.08</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>Moderate involvement</b>

WM–Weighted mean; SD–Standard Deviation

Legend:

4.20-5.00–Always/Very high involvement; 3.40-4.19–Very often/High involvement; 2.60-3.39–Sometimes/Moderate involvement; 1.80-2.59–Rarely/Low involvement; 1.00-1.79–Never/No involvement

Any religious sector in Ozamiz City has music groups or ministries but involvement of college students depends on their singing capability and determination to become a member such as in choir. Music is deeply embedded within a religion shaping ideas, practices, and beliefs. Music is a potent vehicle for the spread of ideology (Irving, 2016). There are worship music groups in the Philippines that have recorded or been known to perform worship music. Another church activity is the “night vigil” which is an evening or nocturnal devotion or prayer and is done before a religious feast or as a day of spiritual preparation. Night vigil in the church is also practiced by Roman Catholics on the night of the Good Friday and Saturday before Easter. In Ozamiz City Catholic Cathedral, a particular religious organization is assigned to offer prayers during Friday night. All-night vigil is a hidden source of spiritual vitality.

It appears that the students were sometimes able to attend church and their involvement in church activities was moderate which could be attributed to their occasional church attendance. The responses of the students did not vary based on the value of the standard deviation. The study of Baring et al. (2016) among college students in a Manila-based Philippine university showed a recent decline in levels of religiosity. The definition of religiosity can also be viewed in terms of membership and church involvement (UST Social Research Center, 1986). Church attendance, among others is included as a measure of spirituality or religiosity (Argue et al., 1999).

The decline in frequent church attendance during college in the US has also been documented by Astin et al. (2010). The largest absolute decline was also observed with Protestants. The Roman Catholic students showed a moderate decline in frequent church attendance. Islam on the other hand, showed an increase in frequent church attendance at religious services. The impact of the 9/11 attacks on the Arab American community in New York was tremendous including a deep concern on stigmatization (Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008). Perhaps the Muslim college students feel the need to overcome the negative stereotype by familiarizing non-Muslims with their faith (Astin et al., 2010).

Conflict of schedule and the many tasks the college students have might also be the reason for the occasional attendance to church. Misamis University is a non-sectarian institution that respects diversity in religion. Hence, a considerable number of different religious organizations are given the freedom to assemble inside the campus during a particular time and carry out religious activities. Membership in religious organizations in school campus may motivate students to frequently attend the church. Baring et al. (2016) reported that majority of college students in a university in Manila are more involved in religious organizations inside the campus than outside the university.

The moderate involvement in church activities as shown in this study may be largely affected by their attendance. Bowen (1997) also found decreases in college student involvement in religious activity, such as worship attendance. Nevertheless, Foster and LaForce's (1999) showed that students who persisted until their senior year exhibited more positive changes in religious development than did their nonpersisting peers. Change in students' religious faith and practice during the time of college attendance may support positive religious growth (Hartley III, 2004). College environments, faculty support, and academic courses and co-curricular programs that offer exploration of religious issues can positively influence the development of students' religiosity (Lee, 2002). Other factors contributing to faith development included attending college with peers who were involved in religious activities. Hence, attending religious services leads to a strengthening of religious beliefs and convictions.

The freedom that Misamis University as a non-sectarian institution gives to students' different religious organizations may have aided the students to get motivated to involve in church activities. Students assemble inside the campus during a particular time and carry out religious activities. Involvement in religious organizations is associated with students becoming more spiritually confident and committed (Bryant, 2007).



### ***Students' values formation***

Table 2 shows the values formation in students. Overall, the values exhibited by college students were well-developed and their perceptions did not vary. However, looking into each of the values, composure/peace and tolerance/adaptability were adequately-developed. Based on personal observations, these two sets of values were manifested by students in the way they resolve conflicts with other students without fighting and in getting along with students who are indifferent, respectively. The latter could be due to the fact that giving trust to anybody who seems indifferent is necessary to consider before one gets along with him. This result is strengthened by the findings of Navarez and Cayubit (2013) which showed that most of the time, the inability to get along with others is because one views them as "others" and not like oneself.

Courtesy to teachers obtained the highest mean among all values. Students have been courteous and well-mannered to both teachers and students but exemplified these gestures more to teachers. Students in MU always acknowledge their teachers by saying the "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" greeting whether inside the classroom, along the lobby, any corner inside the campus, or even outside the school premises. This gesture has become a culture in MU and could be regarded as one of the characteristics of the MU student. Being courteous is behaving in a manner that is respectful or considerate of others (Jucker et al., 2012). Courtesy and manners go hand-in-hand as courtesy means putting good manners into practice. Showing consideration and good manners brings out a feeling of worth which courtesy entails. Hence, students affirmed that they have a good relationship with their teachers and students which depicts harmony/friendship shown to be a well-developed value set also in this study. Respect is connected to courtesy (Chang & Chou, 2015). In this study, respect is another value that is well-developed in students and has been shown to people regardless of who they are.

**Table 2. Students' values formation.**

Values	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remarks
1. Courtesy			
a. To teachers	3.66	1.68	Well-developed
b. To fellow students	3.50	0.55	Well-developed
2. Harmony/Friendship	3.40	0.61	Well-developed
3. Respect	3.51	0.58	Well-developed
4. Fairness	3.57	0.56	Well-developed
5. Grit/Determination	3.54	0.56	Well-developed
6. Helpfulness/Care	3.50	0.55	Well-developed
7. Fearlessness/Selflessness	3.44	0.65	Well-developed
8. Learning/Openness	3.47	0.58	Well-developed
9. Self-awareness/Sensitivity	3.45	0.56	Well-developed
10. Involvement/Community	3.43	0.57	Well-developed
11. Composure/Peace	3.39	0.65	Adequately-developed
12. Tolerance/Adaptability	3.30	0.65	Adequately-developed
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>Well-developed</b>

4.20-5.00–Very well-developed; 3.40-4.19–Well-developed; 2.60-3.39–Adequately-developed; 1.80-2.59– Poorly-developed; 1.00-1.79–Very poorly-developed

Students' value on fairness, as shown in this study, is well-developed and this has been manifested by agreeing that everyone should be treated equally. People may view fairness in different angles. Fairness is viewed as a critical factor in classroom outcomes and teacher-student relationships (Chory, 2007). Fairness is known to raise academic success in the educational setting (Uludag & Yaratan, 2013). Hence, promoting fairness in the classroom while maintaining academic rigor are also expected not only from students but from the teachers as well to achieve effective instruction (Horan et al., 2010). It was speculated that students who are in ideal classroom setting have higher levels of fairness perception and students who possess the perceptions of fairness tend to have lower levels physical aggression (Uludag & Yaratan, 2013; Uludag, 2014). Fairness is also regarded as a measure of morality (Haidt, 2012) although the study of Silver and Abell (2016) showed that moral foundations theory provides a framework for measuring morality that extends beyond the typical focus on fairness.

In this current study, grit/determination is a value set that is also well-developed in students. Grit or determination is defined as the degree to which individuals are predisposed to persevere and stay passionate towards pursuing long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit/determinations has been associated with higher academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2014; Wolters & Hussain 2015; Rimfeld et al., 2016). Hence, grit/determination is a value set that increases the chance to achieve success (Kaur, 2014). It comes with practice and then can transform one's life and others.

Helpfulness/care is a value set that is also well-developed in students and has been exemplified by peer-mentoring. Helpfulness/care is also exemplified in peer-mentoring (Briggs, 2013). Another value set that is perceived to be well-developed in students is selflessness/fearlessness which is shown by the willingness to stand up for other students based on personal observation. This value can also be associated with defending behaviors when someone is bullied in school. Defending behaviors may be driven by students' empathic response to the victims' experience (Pöyhönen et al., 2010).

Based on personal observation, students in MU are willing to learn valuable things from other cultures which is a manifestation of the value of learning or openness to cultural diversity that is well-developed in them. Being open to learn from other cultures depicts cultural humility that could foster mutual benefit (Foronda et al., 2016). Students are aware also how their behavior impacts on others which is an example of the value of self-awareness/sensitivity which is generally seen as an inwardly focused evaluative process in which individuals use reflection to make self-comparisons to reality and the feedback of others (Steiner, 2014). The goal of the self-awareness process is to create better self-knowledge, make adjustments and improvements, and accommodate for weaknesses.

Involvement/community is also a well-developed value shown by students by getting involved in the community. Based on personal observation, students in MU are engaged in community services and outreach such as clean-up of esteros, feeding of children, and voluntary field teaching.

***Relationship between students' involvement in church activities and their values formation***

Table 3 shows that there is a significant relationship between the students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. Despite the fact that students were sometimes able to attend church activities and the extent of their involvement was moderate which could be attributed to their occasional church attendance, such involvement has been shown to correlate to the values that the students perceived are well-developed in them. Hence, moderate church involvement is still shown to have a link to the values formation of college students. This finding is congruent to the work of Petrova (2016) which affirms that involvement in church activities can promote positive behavior in individuals.

**Table 3. Test of significant relationship between students' involvement in church activities and their values formation**

Variables	r-Value	Level of correlation	p- Value	Remarks
Values formation				
Attendance	0.302	Moderate	0.000	Highly significant
Involvement	0.331	Moderate	0.000	Highly significant

Level of correlation: -0.1 to 0.1- very weak; -0.3 to -0.1 or 0.1 to 0.3 – weak; -0.5 to -0.3 or 0.3 to 0.5 - moderate ; -1.0 to -0.5 or 0.5 to 1.0 - strong

The positive support of MU to church activities of students inside the campus aided with some school activities that are within the church may have contributed to the values formation in students. The study of Bock and Samuelson (2014) showed that the active participation in youth development programs, extracurricular activities, and civic engagement seems to promote a moral identity formation in adolescence that has lasting effects. Although the involvement of MU students to church activities is only moderate, the reception of students to the teachings of the church could also be considered as a factor for the values that they have developed in them. As Khinkanina and Serova (2016) posited, possessing a creative attitude and showing the eagerness

of acquiring knowledge may add to the formation of students' good values to become better individuals.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

College students in Misamis University are sometimes able to attend church and the involvement to church activities is moderate. The students have perceived that they have well-developed values. However, looking into each value, it appears that composure/peace and tolerance/adaptability were only adequately-developed. There is a significant relationship between the students' involvement in church activities and their values formation. The findings of this study may be used by the school in formulating plans that foster church involvement and values formation. Curricular and extracurricular activities may be restructured taking account of the findings of this study.

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