

# An assessment of the LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> programme as a possible approach to Christian formation

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The article places emphasis on the youth in the Christiana district, South Africa. It seems that the youth in South Africa face serious challenges and problems. The emphasis is especially on the farming communities in Christiana in the North-West Province who struggle with violence, alcoholism, poverty, unemployment, occultism and Satanism. The growing statistics of drug abuse, substance use, violence, rape, prostitution, child trafficking, etc. make the challenges widespread and lead to the lives of many young people being destroyed. Through holistic missional outreach programmes, the youth of the Christiana district can be a great harvest to be reaped because the programmes give hope and enrich lives in spite of the challenges the community is facing. The LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> engagement programme, in particular, is a training and equipping tool, which includes various important and relevant aspects that deal with the above-mentioned problems and seeks creative solutions to inspire and equip young people to become responsible citizens in their communities. The goal of the programme is to provide a guide and aid for outreach to the youth of this district with the aim to change, resolve, improve and enrich the lives of young people to ensure Christian formation as a valid alternative for destructive lifestyles, leading to a more meaningful and productive life.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** Socio-economic environment and destructive behavioural patterns lead to many lives destroyed. Preliminary results suggested behavioural modifications linked to biblio-moral intervention. LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> has a transdisciplinary approach comprising three main disciplines and constituencies, Theology, Education and Health. It seeks creative solutions to inspire and equip the youth to become responsible citizens in their communities.

## Introduction and background

This research was performed in the North-West Province of South Africa, and it is part of work in progress and a larger research project in this area (cf. Freeks 2016:206). The Christiana community is riddled by youth crises such as unemployment and many social issues associated with the economic and social situations in this area (cf. Freeks 2016:206).

Christiana is situated on the banks of the Vaal River in the North-West Province and is an agricultural district with a population of 15 322 inhabitants (Anon 2013; cf. also Freeks 2016:206).

According to Freeks (2016:206), the youth in this community could benefit from a programme that can train and equip them with the knowledge and skills to make better choices regarding the challenges that they have to face in their daily lives. The LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> Training and Equipping Programme could be the ideal programme for this community. Further, this programme has been introduced and implemented in the area where 486 young people have been part of it (Freek 2016:206).

## The LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> Training and Equipping Programme

The LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> Training and Equipping Programme is the brainchild of social sciences. The faculty of health sciences designed the programme upon commission as a socio-behavioural intervention that includes a marginal faith-based, that is, Christian, component. The objective was to train and equip farm workers with a view to stimulate behavioural modification among young people and farm workers in their choices regarding destructive behaviour and behavioural challenges (cf. Freeks 2008). The primary design intent was not as a church programme to promote theological knowledge. The ultimate reason for this programme was to address poverty and improve well-being among farm workers. LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> never intended, nor is it the appropriate

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instrument, to measure destructive behaviour such as crime, murder, robbery, assault, theft, burglary, hijacking, kidnapping, rape, pregnancy and many others as indicated in Figure 1 of the South African Police Service (SAPS) statistics. In fact, the programme targets negative social values, assuming that negative behaviour will change.

## The history of the LIFEPLAN<sup>®</sup> programme

The North-West University aspires to be:

a pre-eminent university in Africa, driven by the pursuit of knowledge innovation and community involvement to

| Crime Research and Statistics -South African Police Service                         |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Crime in Christiana (NW) for April to March 2003/2004 - 2012/2013                   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Crime Category                                                                      | April 2003 to March 2004 | April 2004 to March 2005 | April 2005 to March 2006 | April 2006 to March 2007 | April 2007 to March 2008 | April 2008 to March 2009 | April 2009 to March 2010 | April 2010 to March 2011 | April 2011 to March 2012 | April 2012 to March 2013 |
| <b>CONTACT CRIME (CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON)</b>                                    |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Murder                                                                              | 5                        | 6                        | 12                       | 5                        | 8                        | 11                       | 6                        | 4                        | 11                       | 5                        |
| Total Sexual Crimes                                                                 | 22                       | 37                       | 37                       | 38                       | 41                       | 60                       | 51                       | 44                       | 49                       | 61                       |
| Attempted murder                                                                    | 4                        | 3                        | 1                        | 2                        | 8                        | 8                        | 5                        | 1                        | 7                        | 4                        |
| Assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm                             | 133                      | 138                      | 141                      | 138                      | 172                      | 121                      | 117                      | 173                      | 144                      | 129                      |
| Common assault                                                                      | 174                      | 145                      | 141                      | 103                      | 135                      | 159                      | 96                       | 133                      | 108                      | 112                      |
| Common robbery                                                                      | 23                       | 26                       | 21                       | 21                       | 32                       | 31                       | 23                       | 25                       | 24                       | 23                       |
| Robbery with aggravating circumstances                                              | 6                        | 5                        | 8                        | 13                       | 9                        | 15                       | 11                       | 18                       | 13                       | 13                       |
| <b>CONTACT-RELATED CRIMES</b>                                                       |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Arson                                                                               | 3                        | 4                        | 1                        | 2                        | 2                        | 3                        | 2                        | 4                        | 4                        | 2                        |
| Malicious damage to property                                                        | 61                       | 68                       | 63                       | 55                       | 46                       | 58                       | 66                       | 61                       | 69                       | 67                       |
| <b>PROPERTY-RELATED CRIMES</b>                                                      |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Burglary at non-residential premises                                                | 36                       | 56                       | 11                       | 19                       | 36                       | 38                       | 39                       | 47                       | 44                       | 36                       |
| Burglary at residential premises                                                    | 113                      | 104                      | 128                      | 111                      | 178                      | 150                      | 153                      | 159                      | 233                      | 175                      |
| Theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle                                               | 14                       | 14                       | 17                       | 12                       | 12                       | 11                       | 9                        | 13                       | 3                        | 11                       |
| Theft out of or from motor vehicle                                                  | 26                       | 23                       | 32                       | 22                       | 27                       | 28                       | 16                       | 26                       | 17                       | 21                       |
| Stock-theft                                                                         | 53                       | 34                       | 17                       | 26                       | 29                       | 17                       | 14                       | 9                        | 16                       | 18                       |
| <b>CRIMES HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON POLICE ACTION FOR DETECTION</b>                      |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Illegal possession of firearms and ammunition                                       | 3                        | 1                        | 3                        | 1                        | 3                        | 2                        | 2                        | 1                        | 0                        | 0                        |
| Drug-related crime                                                                  | 35                       | 48                       | 45                       | 43                       | 62                       | 73                       | 45                       | 22                       | 20                       | 11                       |
| Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs                                     | 11                       | 12                       | 6                        | 8                        | 8                        | 20                       | 15                       | 15                       | 20                       | 34                       |
| <b>OTHER SERIOUS CRIMES</b>                                                         |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| All theft not mentioned elsewhere                                                   | 237                      | 204                      | 180                      | 160                      | 174                      | 195                      | 159                      | 175                      | 157                      | 135                      |
| Commercial crime                                                                    | 15                       | 14                       | 14                       | 12                       | 16                       | 17                       | 13                       | 34                       | 21                       | 27                       |
| Shoplifting                                                                         | 15                       | 8                        | 11                       | 15                       | 10                       | 6                        | 5                        | 7                        | 5                        | 5                        |
| <b>SUBCATEGORIES OF AGGRAVATED ROBBERY FORMING PART OF AGGRAVATED ROBBERY ABOVE</b> |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Carjacking                                                                          | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        |
| Truck hijacking                                                                     | 0                        | 0                        | 1                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 3                        | 0                        | 0                        |
| Robbery at residential premises                                                     | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 3                        | 1                        | 1                        | 1                        | 5                        | 6                        |
| Robbery at non-residential premises                                                 | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 3                        | 7                        | 8                        | 2                        | 2                        |
| <b>OTHER CRIME CATEGORIES</b>                                                       |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Culpable homicide                                                                   | 14                       | 10                       | 10                       | 10                       | 9                        | 8                        | 1                        | 6                        | 7                        | 15                       |
| Public violence                                                                     | 1                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 2                        | 0                        | 1                        | 1                        | 0                        | 0                        |
| Crimen injuria                                                                      | 58                       | 53                       | 44                       | 32                       | 34                       | 31                       | 30                       | 32                       | 29                       | 27                       |
| Neglect and ill-treatment of children                                               | 3                        | 0                        | 3                        | 5                        | 2                        | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 3                        | 1                        |
| Kidnapping                                                                          | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 2                        | 0                        | 0                        | 0                        | 2                        | 1                        | 5                        |

Source: South African Police Service (SAPS), 2013, 'Crime research and statistics--South African Police Service', Crime in Christiana (NW) for April to March 2003/2004--2012/2013, viewed 20 August 2016, from [http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2013/crime\\_stats.htm](http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2013/crime_stats.htm)

**FIGURE 1:** South African Police Service 2013 crime statistics in the Christiana district.

contribute to providing solutions for reconstruction and development of communities. (Freeks 2008:ii–iii)

## What is LIFEPLAN®?

According to Freeks (2008), LIFEPLAN® follows a path of core lecturing exercises and activities that build knowledge, promote interpersonal skills and trust through contact and sharing, build thinking and planning skills, build motivation and commitment to action (cf. also Freeks 2016:214).

Furthermore, the programme was compiled based on the hierarchical needs assessment scale and the in-depth research of Maslow (Schultz & Schultz 2013:246; cf. also Freeks 2016:215).

## The role of universities

The importunate appeal of the South African government is that universities should be involved in the upliftment and transforming of societies to help reduce some of these challenges and problems among the youth of South Africa (cf. Freeks 2016:213). According to Knoetze (2015:163), the youth should be involved in every theological, political and socio-economical discussion because they are the South Africa of today and not of tomorrow.

Because of the community engagement of the North-West University in the province to do intervention through training and equipping programmes, it led to the implementation of the LIFEPLAN® programme 4 years ago. The programme has the potential and possibility to contribute towards character formation and to reduce some of the destructive crises and challenges facing the youth (cf. Freeks 2016:2013).

## Biblical and theological principles concerning Christian formation

In this article, Christian formation should be viewed as part of salvation and human formation that confirm that God, as Father, sent Jesus Christ his Son, as Saviour, to redeem humankind by transforming the inner person through the Holy Spirit (Chandler 2015:314). The Holy Spirit put Jesus Christ in our hearts as Saviour in order for us to be conformed (Plant 2015:185). Therefore, it is crucial to know that we are created as holistic persons and conformed through the image of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). In Hebrews 1:3, we read that Jesus Christ is 'the express image of the Person of God'. The Greek word literally means 'a tool used for engraving' (Arndt, Danker & Bauer 2000:1077–1078). Jesus Christ is an 'engraving' of God. From a Christian and biblical perspective, Christian formation indicates that God's goal for his children is to become an exact engraved copy of Jesus Christ and to become conformed to his image. Hence, our lives should be characterised by growth, especially spiritual growth, so that we can become whole (cf. Chandler 2015:315). Becoming whole is a life to the glory of God and in faith, which signifies a life *coram Deo* (before the face of God) (Hegeman, Edgell & Jochemsen 2011:1–2).

Traditional, as well as contemporary, theological literature pertaining to spiritual growth emphasises that the term spiritual growth implies becoming more and more like Jesus, and that the more people understand God's character as revealed in his Word, the more they see his holiness, faithfulness and his trustworthiness, and the more they can risk being completely themselves (McCreary & McCreary 1999:586; Nadler 1984:20; Pink 2005; Insight for Living 2007). Becoming whole and holy unto God is, in any case, God's work in human beings (Brown 2011:65–66).

Nevertheless, to be conformed through Christ in the process of Christian formation, it is of paramount importance to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Relationships can shape people into the image of Christ, who, if they are engaged in healthy relationships, tend to flourish. But if they are involved in unhealthy relationships, their holistic growth can be impeded (Chandler 2015:321–322). *Relationships* is a fundamental theme in the LIFEPLAN® programme because it teaches that human beings should live in a relationship with God, themselves, others and the world around them (cf. Freeks 2008:1). Hence, if someone becomes more and more like Jesus, it radiates into his or her character traits. Newton (2004:14–15) summarises: 'Growth in the Christian life requires an on-going intimacy in one's relationship with Christ'.

Interconnected relationships is prayer, and it is essential in the process of Christian formation and involves the saying of Psalms, reading of the Bible, singing of hymns, worshipping, meditating, fasting and taking communion (Plant 2015:185). Prayer is, in fact, a vital issue in the LIFEPLAN® programme. In the quantitative research, 87.4% of farm workers indicated that they pray when they experience a problem or challenge.

## The LIFEPLAN® programme should correlate with Christian formation

The LIFEPLAN® programme should line up with Christian formation because Christian formation is the formation of the *inner being* and results in the transformation of the whole person (body, soul or mind, spirit) (cf. Freeks 2016:219). In other words, it is concerned with personal change and the renewing of one's mind (Porter 2014:250; cf. also Rm 12:2). It is further the deepening of one's faith and spiritual growth, and the spirit of the human being which is his heart, spirit, will or mind as the place where the work of Christ has to be done (Porter 2014:250). Hence, to speak of Christian formation (and spirituality) is not to speak about a part of life, but rather about the whole of one's life (cf. Buys 2014:135).

Formation work is 'heart work'; therefore, the human heart is the well-spring of all human action. The heart is being made into a dwelling place for God and the heart should be kept with God (Foster 2011:27). Christian formation is, therefore, the basic initiative of God through Jesus Christ, his death on the cross and his resurrection. These terms describe

Christian formation; it is personal and inward because Jesus lived through these in the body, personally and openly. The life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal bodies and letting death work in us so that life may work in others (cf. Keith, White & Willmer 2014:112). It is crucial that the LIFEPLAN® programme be in line with the fact that God works through Jesus with respect to change of heart, mind and human choices.

Christian formation and growth (as previously mentioned) start with the pre-eminent role of the Word of God in the lives of his people and is a reference to the dynamic means of sanctification. It deals with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual growth in the lives of the youth. Christian formation (included spirituality) is grounded in Scripture and inspired by the Holy Spirit:

... He may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (Eph 3:16–17)

The use of Scripture alone in the lives of young people is not enough for their formation and growth. Jesus Christ should be the ideal choice for growth and formation. Hence, the focus and emphasis in the LIFEPLAN® programme should be more on Jesus Christ, who conformed our image. This process of being conformed to the image of Christ is actually for the sake of others. Jesus Christ is the Shepherd and he cares for souls by interceding for us (Mt 6:25); he heals us (Ac 3:16); he convicts and forgives us (Jn 16:8 & Ja 5:16); he cleanses us (2 Pt 1:19); and he comforts us (2 Cor 1:3) (Barber & Barker 2014:272).

## Youth problems and challenges in the Christiana district

The LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme, in the 6 years of its implementation in the Christiana district, seems to be making an impact, and is making inroads on alleviating youth challenges (cf. Freeks 2016:215). However, there seems to be typical examples of serious challenges and problems among the youth in the rural farming districts of Christiana (Nieuwoudt 2013; cf. also Freeks 2016:215).

School performance in the Christiana district is a serious concern because of the fact that most learners are illiterate and underperform in school, because of a lack of vision and laziness. Learners fail and cause problems for teachers because they cannot read and spell. Therefore, underperformance in the school-system is mentioned as a source of disturbance. Learners drop out of school and involve themselves in destructive behavioural patterns (cf. also Freeks 2016:207).

Another serious concern in the Christiana area is teenage pregnancy. Records indicate that around 9% of female learners fall pregnant, particularly girls between ages 16 and 18. There is a serious case of one learner, a 16-year-old girl who has given birth to her second child, in all likelihood

having had her first child when she was 14-years-old (Frees 2016:207).

The drug abuse by learners is a serious concern to the schools in the area and the community has been referred to as *sick* as a result of the prevalent use of drugs (Frees 2016:207). Disappointing to most teachers and disrupting classes is the fact that learners smoke cannabis, glue and various types of tablets on school grounds and this, naturally, affects their behaviour in class. This drug problem of learners affects not only the schools, but the broader community as a whole (Frees 2016:207). Besides the drug problem is also alcohol abuse by learners, and this abuse is the main problem in schools because these learners spend much of their time at drinking places, such as *taverns* instead of in the classrooms (Frees 2016:207).

Gangsterism among learners operates and develops in secret, but it operates in communities in such a way that learners are directly or indirectly influenced by the activities of these gangsters (Frees 2016:207). Most of these learners have been found carrying dangerous weapons in their school bags, that is, knives, sticks and panga's (cf. Freeks 2016:207). There were reported incidents such as learners fighting in class, learners stabbing other learners and teachers, and even trying to shoot other learners (Frees 2016:207). Naturally, some teachers have taken to protecting themselves with weapons (Frees 2016:207).

There is a great lack of involvement of youth in church life, and this is a serious concern to most of the Christian pastors in the community (Frees 2016:208). These young people refuse to attend church, and therefore, low church attendance is the norm in the community (Frees 2016:208). Participation in the activities of the church is of no importance to most of the youth (Frees 2016:208). Instead, the youth appear to be rather driven and influenced by politics; a fact which often causes tension and havoc in some of the churches (Frees 2016:208).

The unemployment among the youth is a huge problematic factor, not only in terms of its impact on the churches, but also in relation to the community as a whole (Frees 2016:208). There is approximately 50% of the youth that are unemployed in the Christiana district, and the unemployment is in a sense the underlying factor behind all the other problems among the youth in Christiana (Frees 2016:208).

In the Christiana district, poverty is one of the major challenges among the black youth. Black youth experience difficult challenges because of racism which has reduced living options and hopelessness further threaten their development.

Christiana has a great number of orphans; this is a serious issue for most of the relevant role players in this area (Frees 2016:208). In the community, child neglect occurs frequently because parents do not care for their children (Frees 2016:208). This leads to child-headed households which are

the order of the day. As a result, many of these children do not make quality life decisions (Freeks 2016:208).

Abortion and HIV-related matters are great concerns as well, and the prevalence of HIV infection and high transmission rate have led to the life expectancy of the population to recede alarmingly (Freeks 2016:208).

School violence in the Christiana district is a serious issue and a negative factor among learners. Learners take part in criminal activities which have been reported to the police; these include burglary and theft, gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, and even rape, and murder. The statistics of juvenile criminal offences in 2013 from the South African Police Service are as follows: murder (9%), sexual crimes (61%), robbery (44%), damage to property (67%), burglary (211%), theft (50%), drugs and alcohol (45%), kidnapping (5%), et cetera (SAPS 2013; Figure 1; cf. also Freeks 2016:208).

Spirituality is a major problem and concern among the youth of Christiana. It is evident that spirituality is not important to some of the youth. The following statistics occurred from the quantitative research which might be a result of youth involvement in church life and church attendance:

- 0.7% of participants do not pray when they experience problems or challenges
- 0.7% of participants indicated that they do not believe that God loves them
- 21.6% of participants believe that God is impersonal and not interested in them (cf. Freeks 2016:218)
- 25.3% of participants indicated that they do not get personal strength
- 60% of participants indicated that they do not have a meaningful relationship with God
- 0.7% of participants believe that God is not concerned about their problems
- 50.3% of participants indicated that they honour, worship and ask blessings from their ancestral spirits (Badimo's) (Freeks 2016:218–219)
- 35.1% of participants indicated that they consult traditional healers (Sangoma's and Inyanga's) about their life and future.

The involvement of the youth in Satanism is a burning issue for the churches and in the communities (Freeks 2016:208). The churches in the community lack relevant youth programmes and trained youth leaders to facilitate outreach to young people in the communities (Freeks 2016:208). In terms of religion and faith matters, religion should be advocated to assist the youth to obtain basic life skills and to cope in life.

## The impact and importance of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme on farm workers

The author attempts to explore the experiences of participants (farm workers), using questionnaires and naïve

sketches in terms of descriptive research (Vyhmeister 2008:151). Quantitative and qualitative empirical research through questionnaires and naïve sketches revealed a clear picture of the impact and importance of the LIFEPLAN® programme with respect to Christian formation.

### Spiritual well-being

This specific aspect was based on the importance of God, our relationship and faith in him (Freeks 2016:217). In Table 1, questions 3, 5, 7, 11 and 12 about God are impersonal, do not get personal strength and support from God, do not have a relationship with God, ancestral spirits and traditional healers have low indications, while questions 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 have high indications because of the impact of the LIFEPLAN® programme (Freeks 2016:217).

It is notable that 96.0% of the participants indicated that they believe that God loves them and cares about them against the 0.7% who do not believe that at all (Freeks 2016:217). Hence, it is disappointing to see that 21.6% believe that God is impersonal and not interested in them against the 63.5% who do not believe that and 14.9% who moderately believe that God is not interested in their lives (Freeks 2016:217). Regarding personal strength and support from God, 25.3% indicated that they certainly do not get strength from God opposite the 54.7% who do (Freeks 2016:218). However, from the 151 participants, 95.3% indicated that they know who they are and they know where they came from, which is a central theme in the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme (Freeks 2016:218). Participants also indicated that 87.2% of them have a personally meaningful relationship with God against the 6.0% who do not have a relationship and 6.7% who moderately have a relationship; 89.4% indicated that they believe God is concerned about their problems, while 0.7% believe God is not and 9.9% who moderately believe God is (Freeks 2016:218).

Further, it is overwhelming to see that 90.1% indicated that their relationship with God contributes to their sense of well-being and 94.0% who believe that there is a real purpose for their life (Freeks 2016:218). In contrast with the above, 50.3% honour, worship and ask blessings from their ancestral spirits (Badimo's) against the 27.8% who do not

**TABLE 1:** Spiritual well-being.

| Questions           | Not at all (1) (%) | Somewhat (moderately) (2) (%) | Certainly (3) (%) |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Loves and cares     | 0.7                | 3.3                           | 96.0              |
| Who am I?           | 1.3                | 3.3                           | 95.3              |
| Impersonal          | 63.5               | 14.9                          | 21.6              |
| Personally          | 6.0                | 6.7                           | 87.2              |
| Personal strength   | 54.7               | 20.0                          | 25.3              |
| Problems            | 0.7                | 9.9                           | 89.4              |
| Relationship        | 46.4               | 13.2                          | 40.4              |
| Feel lonely         | 2.7                | 4.7                           | 92.6              |
| Well-being          | 2.6                | 7.3                           | 90.1              |
| Purpose             | 2.0                | 4.0                           | 94.0              |
| Ancestral spirits   | 27.8               | 21.9                          | 50.3              |
| Traditional healers | 47.7               | 17.2                          | 35.1              |

and 21.9% who moderately indicated that (Freeks 2016:218). The very same scenario occurs with the traditional healers (sangoma's and inyanga's), with 35.1% indicating that they consult them for advice about their life and future against the 47.7% who do not and 17.2% who moderately do that (Freeks 2016:218–219). In general, it seems that to some of the participants spirituality is not as important to them as the other aspects are (Freeks 2016:219).

Results obtained from the qualitative research (naïve sketches) were from participants (farm workers). The data is presented by way of themes and sub-themes from the naïve sketches. Richness is provided by verbatim quotes and a literature control to validate these findings from the naïve sketches. The aim of the literature control is to compare the findings with existing literature and to draw conclusions (cf. Botma et al. 2010:196–197). Based on the findings of the naïve sketches, this article evaluates the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme with its strong and weak points.

### Naïve sketches (farm workers)

The following themes emerged from the naïve sketches about farm workers' lived experiences of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme. The first theme portrays the essence of LIFEPLAN®. The second theme highlights LIFEPLAN® in correlation with the Bible. The third theme depicts healthy relationships. Each theme is discussed including the various sub-categories. A bullet is used to indicate a sub-category under discussion.

#### Theme one: The essence of LIFEPLAN®

Theme one portrays the importance of the LIFEPLAN® programme to the participants. This theme has three sub-category findings which are: The value of LIFEPLAN®; the role of LIFEPLAN® in my life; and God's role in LIFEPLAN®.

**The value of LIFEPLAN®:** Most participants value the LIFEPLAN® programme on a very high level. They expressed their feelings with phrases like: 'LIFEPLAN® taught me to invite God in my problems', 'I value LIFEPLAN®', 'I took LIFEPLAN® and made it my own friend' (Participant 1, Farm worker, Female).

Freeks (2008:2–10) supported the findings in his research by indicating that most people in life have a distorted view of themselves and they also have a distorted view of how God sees and looks at them. The LIFEPLAN® programme has the potential to teach participants about God and enable them to make quality decisions about their life, especially when an individual is faced with making a decision.

**The role of LIFEPLAN® in my life:** Participants expressed the following narratives: 'I thank LIFEPLAN®, it is something that has been missing in my life', 'I took LIFEPLAN® to be part of my life' (Participant 2, Farm worker, Female).

These findings are supported by Freeks (2008:3–4) who indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme has ample and

unique opportunities to make external investments in the lives of participants. People can become specialists in whatever field they work in because no individual is insignificant, and every person is valuable and special.

**God's role in LIFEPLAN®:** Farm workers indicated that God has a role in THE LIFEPLAN® programme and they expressed their views in phrases such as: 'LIFEPLAN® took me back to God', 'LIFEPLAN® taught me how important God and life is' (Participant 1, Farm worker, Female).

God is the most important Person in life because human beings were made by God and for God's pleasure, and until they understand that, life itself will never make sense at all (Van der Walt 1999:328–329; Warren 2002:17–18). These findings are also supported by the LIFEPLAN® programme, which point out that humans are creations of God and therefore godly people, made in the image of God. They live in a relationship with God, with themselves, others and even the world around them. God made them and therefore, they are created as God's inherently good people (cf. Freeks 2008:1). Further, it is fundamental to know that everything started with God and find its purpose in him (cf. Col 1:16).

#### Theme two: The LIFEPLAN® programme in correlation with the Bible

The second theme deals with the LIFEPLAN® programme in accordance with the Bible. Specific sub-category findings include: LIFEPLAN® taught valuable learning lessons regarding the Bible and a life-changing experience through the LIFEPLAN® programme.

**LIFEPLAN® taught valuable learning lessons regarding the Bible:** Participants expressed the following view in words: 'LIFEPLAN® taught me about the Bible' (Participant 1, Farm worker, Female).

Van der Walt (1999:117–118) does not only support but also give meaning to this finding by substantiating that the Bible is a book of faith and the central message is the kingdom of God. The LIFEPLAN® programme taught participants that they are unique individuals who are loved by God and they should view themselves in the way God made them, and not through the eyes of others (cf. Freeks 2008:3–7).

**A life-changing experience through the LIFEPLAN® programme:** Farm workers expressed their experience in words: 'The Bible changed my life' (Participant 3, Farm worker, Male).

The Bible, however, teaches that through Jesus Christ our lives are changed (Phlp 3:21). Van der Walt (2008:15) gives more insight on the finding by indicating that the Bible is God's written revelation where God reveals to us the meaning of things, which would otherwise remain unknowable. Limke and Mayfield (2011:123) take this discussion to a more practical phase by indicating that attachments to God predict psychological well-being, especially where the use

of religious activities are mainly part of it, then a person can cope with life experiences.

### Theme three: Healthy relationships

Theme three demonstrates the aspect of healthy relations with God, family and others. Specific narratives are: healthy relations with God; healthy relations with family; and healthy relations with others.

**Healthy relations with God:** Participants expressed their views about their relationship with God in words such as: 'I am the creation of God', 'LIFEPLAN® took me back to God', 'I have a healthy relationship with God' (Participant 4, Farm worker, Male).

These findings are supported by Munroe (2001:57) where he indicated that people can know the true meaning of their existence by understanding who they are in relation to God's creation of mankind as a whole (cf. also Gn 1 & 2). Through spirituality, people can have healthy relations with God, which is likewise to a Christian who has a personal relationship with God, and this relationship lies at the heart of his or her religious beliefs, experiences and practices (cf. Calvert 2010:22–23).

**Healthy relations with family:** Participants expressed the following narrative: 'I have sound and healthy relations with my family' (Participant 5, Farm worker, Female).

Research in the family context has revealed that supporting families results in better relations and understanding (Howieson & Priddis 2014:178), and therefore, the family should be understood as an institution created and institutionalised by God as part of the coercively maintained basic structure (Neufeld & Davis 2010:102). Sound relations with family members have important effects on children's social behaviour and their psychological development (Berndt & McCandless 2009:63). If not, family life can become less important in the broader social realm (cf. Allan 1990:14; Van Rooi 2011:45). God views and he expects a family to be a higher dignity and power because it is God's holy ordinance (Bergh 2002:47).

**Healthy relations with others:** Participants expressed their opinion in words: 'I have a healthy relationship with other people and that's why, am I a better person today' (Participant 5, Farm worker, Female).

This finding is supported by Rae, Nelson and Pederson (2005:45–52) who indicated that healthier relations with others results in positive relationships, which makes people better human beings. If relationships with others are ongoing it will make crucial contributions to human beings (Yee, Gonzaga & Gable 2014:216). Young (2004:160) agreed with the above-mentioned authors by indicating that mutual trust and respect develop healthy relations between people without the fear of being judged, evaluated or ridiculed.

### Theme four: Gratitude and life changing

Theme four indicates the aspect of thankfulness, life changing and a positive attitude. Specific narratives are: thankfulness; life changing and a positive attitude towards life.

**Thankfulness:** The participants expressed their views in words: 'I feel very grateful', 'I am a better person now' (Participant 6, Farm worker, Male).

These findings are supported by Ahrens and Forbes (2014:342) who mentioned that joyful and pleasant are aspects of a thankful person, and gratitude is the foundation to well-being when a need or desire is fulfilled and mental health throughout the lifespan (cf. also Smith, Tong & Ellsworth 2014:19). Most people want to experience happiness and they value positive emotions such as enthusiasm and excitement (Livingstone & Srivastava 2014:84). One should keep in mind that thankfulness produces good health (Battié 2015:557). Therefore, God expects from us to be thankful in all circumstances (cf. 1 Th 5:18; Eph 5:20). This concept was one of the essential aspects of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme.

### Life changing and a positive attitude towards life:

Participants expressed the following narratives: 'I feel very positive toward life', 'I am not giving up in life', 'I have a vision for my life' (Participant 6, Farm worker, Male).

These findings are supported by Livingstone and Srivastava (2014:84) who indicated in their research that most people want to experience happiness and positive emotions, and they value high positive emotions such as enthusiasm and excitement. Positive attitude and personality result in better, healthier outcomes (Kato et al. 2012:359), which were one of the important modules in the LIFEPLAN® programme. If a person has a negative attitude because of the things that are happening to him, it is likely that the person will give up because the person is focusing on the bad instead of the good (O'Baugh et al. 2008:111). In terms of a vision for your life, if people do not have a vision, the Bible indicated that they will perish (cf. Pr 29:18). Hence, the LIFEPLAN® programme teaches that it is vital to have a vision, or purpose in life.

## Assessing the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme

The author noted that young people in the Christiana district do not only believe in witchcraft, as one of the challenges and problems that was identified, but they practise the belief. Hence, he grappled with vital questions concerning the LIFEPLAN® programme:

- Does the LIFEPLAN® programme offer lessons on how people should handle aspects such as witchcraft, ancestral spirits (Badimo's), traditional healers (Sangoma's), Inyanga's devil worshippers and Satanism? How can the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme be adjusted to deal with such challenges and gaps in the life of young people?

One should realise that powers of witchcraft have no future vision. These fields should be discovered, and the LIFEPLAN® modules should be created that can deal with these challenges and problems. LIFEPLAN® should further be adjusted to handle such problems among the youth. If the programme can deal and handle such problems, the worldview of many people will decline, especially in rural areas where people hold onto these spirits. In the African context and worldview, people believe that no one's power should be higher than the other. The LIFEPLAN® programme is the ideal and unique opportunity to change the worldview of these young people.

## Strong and weak points of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme

Strong points:

- The LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme in its current state is effective especially in the South African context, where 80% of the population identified themselves with the Christian faith, especially those living in poor previously disadvantaged areas and districts of South Africa (Freeks 2016:219).
- The LIFEPLAN® programme was developed only to be used in the context of African young people, hence the success and effectiveness of the programme in rural areas (cf. Freeks 2016:219).
- From the 151 participants who participated in the LIFEPLAN® Training, 90% and more of them indicated that they experienced a positive impact of the programme in their lives (cf. Freeks 2016:219–220).

Weak points:

- The LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme does not deal effectively and explicitly with the fundamental aspect of spirituality. It is clear in the article that spirituality is not important to some participants in the Christiana district.
- The effectiveness and significance of the programme might not have the same impact and effectiveness in other countries with regard to their religious demographic context such as the Christian faith. Therefore, the programme should be tested but also contextualised within other contexts in order to measure its effectiveness and impact in urban context and in first world countries such as the Netherlands, Portugal, et cetera (cf. Freeks 2016:219).
- The programme should also be tested in the *Two-Thirds World*, *Three-Fourths World* and *majority world* in Africa, such as Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, et cetera, where it might be beneficial because LIFEPLAN® after all is based on Christian formation (cf. Freeks 2016:219).
- The feedback and results that the author received from some of the participants concerning the LIFEPLAN® programme were not all positive. Some results illustrated the following: 'LIFEPLAN® taught me nothing', 'I learned nothing from the programme' (Participant 7, Farm worker, Female). However, this kind of response constitutes the

exception rather than the rule because, from the sample size of 151 participants (broader research in Christiana), 90% and more indicated a positive impact of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme (cf. Freeks 2016:219:220).

- It must be investigated whether LIFEPLAN® can be effective within a context whereby participants exhibit higher levels of literacy because the programme was designed, developed and compiled to support participants who are under-developed, unemployed, illiterate, semi-literate to become skilled, self-sustainable, independent and hard working to direct their own lives (cf. Freeks 2016:220).
- The programme may develop more guidelines and a training manual for facilitators of the programme. In such a training manual the underlying philosophy goals and expected outcomes should be explained in more detail in order to motivate the facilitators in their presentation of the programme (cf. Freeks 2016:220).
- In contextualising the programme, it might be necessary to consider the different learning styles of people from different backgrounds, that is, *Field Dependent* and *Field Independent* learning styles<sup>1</sup> (cf. Freeks 2016:220).

## Remaining questions

For the sake of assessing the missional impact and possible ongoing improvement of the programme, the following questions should be considered:

- How could the involvement of Christian churches be secured in the offering of the programme and doing follow-up after young people have been part of the programme?
- How could this programme be improved to be a tool and opportunity for Christian formation, evangelism and discipleship for wider use by churches, schools, NGO's, local government and institutions?
- How could the programme be developed to lead young people to discover their unique gifts and talents and be equipped to become part of the transformation of broken communities?
- How could leadership potential be identified and leaders be developed to implement ongoing transformation among the youth?
- What are predominant worldviews and how can deliberate efforts of transforming of worldviews and Christian formation be implemented?

## Limitations and recommended improvements

The first shortcoming of the LIFEPLAN® programme was the insufficient tools used to address intensive problems.

1. When we add to this the findings of educational psychologists, who are concerned with describing *how* people learn in terms of behaviour, we learn of two learning styles which appear to correspond rather well to the functions of the left and right sides of the brain. Based upon the social environment preferred by each style of learning, these two basic learning styles are called 'field-independent' and 'field-dependent'. The field-independent learners 'approach their tasks analytically, separating the elements. They pay close attention to internal referents and are less influenced by social factors' (Earle & Bowen 1989:272). On the other hand, field-dependent learners 'approach situations "globally", that is, they see the whole instead of the parts. They rely on external referents to guide them in processing information. They have a social orientation' (cf. Freeks 2016:220).

A second shortcoming was the dimension of spirituality where aspects such as discipleship, mentorship, salvation, repentance, forgiveness of sins and others, not included in the programme or naïve sketches and questionnaires. Therefore, it is fundamental that the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme should be adapted and amended, in order to include the element of spirituality. A modified LIFEPLAN® programme anticipates a more theologically informed approach.

## Conclusion

The LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme in the Christiana district was not only a means of training and equipping farm workers to be better human beings.

They also improved themselves by practising good Christian behaviour, and more participants showed tremendous interest in Christianity where prayer meetings and scripture readings had become the order of the day. The LIFEPLAN® programme may provide a significant opportunity for the North-West University to partner with churches, schools and other community structures to transform broken communities, but more investigation is needed (cf. Freeks 2016:220). It should also lay out more theological and missiological principles of holistic missional outreach to possibly improve the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme to improve its effectiveness as a tool for Christian formation in the midst of youth challenges and problems (cf. Freeks 2016:220).

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