

THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS ON CHURCH GROWTH:  
A CASE STUDY OF UPATA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

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## ABSTRACT

This research work is an attempt to find out the role spiritual gifts have played in the growth of churches. Five churches within the Upata Baptist Association were selected to represent the eighteen churches that make up the Association. These churches were Central Baptist Church, Edeoha; First Baptist Church, Ikata; Divine Baptist Church, Ula-Upata; First Baptist Church, Ihuaba; and Amazing-grace Baptist Church, Ihuowo. Questionnaire was used to elicit necessary information from respondents in each of the sample churches. Thereafter, the result was used to judge the entire population. Chi-Square (Simple percentage) descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data collated, whereupon these findings were made. Eighteen spiritual gifts were examined for use in the sampled churches. The study revealed that all the eighteen spiritual gifts were present in these churches, but were not adequately harnessed and nurtured towards church growth. It was likewise discovered that some members are either not aware or uncertain of the presence of these gifts in their lives. Furthermore, it was also found out that the available gifts were not channeled towards church growth. The result empirically showed that there is no impact of spiritual gifts in the growth of churches in Upata Baptist Association. In lieu of the findings, the researcher recommends that pastors should emphasis more about spiritual gifts from the pulpit. Also, enough time should be employed to ministry activities of the church rather than spending more time on programmes and organizational activities. Furthermore, the discipleship training courses of the Nigerian Baptist Convention should be taken more seriously, and may even be adapted and be contextualized to the native language of Ekpeye people. Again, the churches should be structured to be ministry-oriented rather than the already existing organization-oriented to cope with the contemporary ministry trend and impact positively to the community where the churches are located. Further researchers are needed on the perception of members on spiritual gifts and church growth.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The presence and proper use of all spiritual gifts within a local church will naturally spur the church to growth and enhance the sound spiritual well-being of members. Their state of spiritual well-being will translate into Christian service thereby increasing commitment, and with the available resources bring about church growth. As indicated in the purpose of the study, and ascertained in the findings, it was discovered that members have poor attitude in their personal lives and attendance to Bible studies. Mid-week prayer meetings, Bible studies, etc which are meant to build the prayer life of a Christian were apparently neglected, and where available was handled with levity. As a result, their commitments to mission endeavours and evangelism activities have suffered neglect. This attested to the fact that these churches which were planted for over forty years now are yet to multiply or have a preaching station.

The Nigerian Baptist Convention as part of their commitment in nurturing her members and equipping them to propagate the gospel and grow the churches carefully designed Discipleship Training Courses. These were abandoned in these churches as shown in the findings. It is disheartening to hear that some members are not aware of this opportunity.

Commitment to organizational meetings such as Men Missionary Union, Women Missionary Union and the Youth organizations is quite encouraging and commendable. This, to some extent, enhances interpersonal relationship among them. Nevertheless, this shows that the available time of church members and the church in general is more spent in discussing the well-being of these organizations rather than planning for the growth of the church. Attendance to meetings is seen

as sign of seriousness, responsibility and maturity of members. It could be that the concept of church growth is grossly misunderstood and, therefore, misapplied.

Church Ministry group opportunities, which are avenues to manifest and use the inherent spiritual gifts in every believer to edify each other and minister to believers and unbelievers outside the church were seen to be absent from these churches. Hence, the church resources - human, financial and spiritual - are not adequately employed to impact positively in the communities where these churches are located to bring about church growth. And because these opportunities are not found, the resultant effect is that the churches are not experiencing growth.

### 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are hereby given:

It was observed that some members of these churches are not aware of the operatives and workings of spiritual gifts in their Christian living. This is evident in the way the respondents scored the spiritual gifts records. It is, therefore, recommended that pastors should teach members about spiritual gifts from the pulpit. It is when pastors teach a lot about spiritual gifts can members easily talk about it among themselves; and they become inquisitive about it. The need for Bible study and Mid-week prayer meetings should furthermore be emphasized by the worship leaders.

It was also observed that the available time of members are engaged more into church organizations and administrative activities. While this is commendable, the writer further suggests that enough time should be employed to



ministry activities of the church where their gifts will be discovered and used maximally, especially for church growth. The worship leaders should deliberately integrate church growth principles in their meetings, thereby using the organizations to grow the church.

The discipleship training courses of the Nigerian Baptist Convention should be taken more seriously. Moreso, worship leaders should not only see it as a necessity but may make them compulsory in all churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. It could as well be adapted and be contextualized to other languages, especially Ekpeye language – the common speaking language of the people of Upata Baptist Association. I strongly believed that this will go along a way to discovering, nurturing, equipping these churches for the task of church growth.

Furthermore, for the great commission of spreading the gospel (church growth), and for these churches to cope and measure with the contemporary demand of churches, there is need to re-structured the church from being organizational-oriented to ministry-oriented. The researcher believes members will effectively use their endowed gifts better in their respective ministries, and, therefore, impacting positively in the church and the society where the church find themselves, thereby resulting to church growth.

From the responses, it could be deduced that discipleship courses available in the Nigerian Baptist Convention are not available in these churches. These courses, for example, The Master Life, are designed to teach members about spiritual gifts, nurture and mature them in Christ Jesus. The writer, therefore, suggests that these courses be taken seriously, or even be made compulsory to all church members of Nigerian Baptist Convention.

Further researchers are needed on the perception of members on spiritual gifts and church growth. This should focus on measuring their perception about the growth of the church and their readiness to acknowledge the inherent gift(s) in their lives.

It is as well suggested that instruments used for a similar research work should include such questions that will elicit respondents' ministry interests in order to discover their gifts.