

PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CHURCHES OF BETHEL BAPTIST
ASSOCIATION, OGBOMOSO BAPTIST CONFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

This research work is an attempt to find out the situation of Peace and Conflict Resolution in churches of Bethel Baptist Association of Ogbomoso Conference. Nine churches within Bethel Baptist Association were selected to represent the eighteen churches that make up the Association. These churches were Adeniran Memorial Baptist Church, Alafia-Oluwa Baptist Church, Antioch Baptist Church, Ayo Igbala Baptist Church, New Era Baptist Church, Ola-Oluwa Baptist Church, Orison Iye Baptist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church and The Glad-Tidings Baptist Church. Questionnaire and Interview Guide was used to elicit necessary information from respondents in each of the sample churches and also from leaders of the different levels of administration of the Nigerian Baptist denomination. 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 concluded. The following areas were included in the questionnaire – personal data, causes of conflict, effects of conflict and solution and help for churches experiencing conflict while the interview guide had these areas – response from the different levels of leadership, help from sister Baptist churches, action plans to forestall future occurrence and discipline, these were administered in the sample churches and to leaders at different levels of administration. The research revealed that there was conflict in some churches of the association. The respondents were made up of both male and female and the majority of respondents fall between the ages of thirty and forty years of age (32.9%) and forty-one to fifty years of age (31.7%). It also discovered that lack of understanding topped the list of causes of conflict in the church with 96.4% followed by Unforgiveness and bitterness with 91.5% and then division and factions with 90.3%. Also brought to light is the effect of conflict on the church and the effect that topped the list is breakdown in communication with 93.9%, which shows that many things will be affected including evangelism, mission and church activities. Then the ripple effects go on, if not checked on time. Furthermore, it was found out that the church experiencing conflict needs help especially from Sister Baptist churches and the Association because they are the closest to the local church facing conflict. They could help by praying, visiting to counsel and reconcile the parties involved. The leaders at different levels of administration can step in to rebuke, counsel and discipline where necessary. The results empirically shows that there is impact of conflict on churches and the way of Peace and Conflict Resolution is possible and then re-emphasize some ethical issues like love, justice, impartiality, sincerity, relationship, effective communication etc that were absent before the conflict. In lieu of the findings, the researcher recommends that churches should organize seminars on conflict/conflict resolution, communication skills, relationship and leadership. The church should organize discipleship programmes for members regularly, there should be membership class for new members and those on transfer from other Baptist churches, then regular prayer meetings should be organized, there should be checks and balances especially in the finances of the church, a booklet should be compiled and published as guide to how to handle conflict, just to mention a few.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were established: interpersonal frictions are inevitable in human relationships especially within the church. Hence the church as a type of human relationship cannot but have its own share of crisis at one point or the other. Beside, the crisis may not be the problem of concern as compared to the way and manner in which the crisis was handled. So, interpersonal conflicts may not degenerate into insults, fighting or life threatening situations if properly handled. This brings to the fore the issue of conflict resolution and depending on the Holy Spirit to help the process go through successfully. Still yet, the issue of each being patient to understand each other is very important so that it does not lead to conflict. From the findings, it was noted that lack of understanding tops the list of causes with Lack of understanding tops the list of causes of conflict in the church with 96.4 percent followed by Unforgiveness and bitterness with 91.5 percent and the next is division and factions with 90.3 percent.

Churches experiencing conflict should develop dialogue culture and willingness to reason, this was pointed out from the interview responses of church members and denominational leaders. Each member should be encourage to air their views in appropriate forums of the church or an open door policy should be practiced where members can approach the pastor one on one to present their issues to him where necessary. The church pastor should seek counsel from higher authority for guidance to take appropriate steps in decision making and also to abreast with what is

happening in the denomination. Teaching is important in the church as this was suggested by the responses from the interview guide.

The church should have regular time of prayers together as this will help to build the spiritual life of the church and also help to avoid cracks in relationships. Then as church members we must learn to understand our differences in culture, educational inclination, backgrounds and level of perception. The church and the pastor should work together as a family where the honours and respect their pastor and the pastor in turn loves and cares for the church.

5.3 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations drawn from the research in relation to the responses of the respondents from the questionnaires and interview guide.

1. Evangelistic sermons should be encouraged in the church and those who respond should be followed up and disciplined. Then teaching should be carried out periodically.
2. The church should organize seminars on conflict/conflict resolution, communication skills, relationship and leadership. The church should also organize retreat for families as a way of build strong and stable homes.
3. The church should also organize discipleship programmes for members regularly.
4. The church should observe regular church-in-conference where reports will be presented so that church members will know and follow the progress of the church. This means regular financial reports should be made available to church members.

5. Then, only members of the church that have been disciplined and shown progressive level of maturity should be given leadership position in the church. This includes the youths. They should be groomed and disciplined and given opportunities to serve in the church.
6. There should membership class for new members and those on transfer from other Baptist church. This will help for assessing of the new members and also acquaint the new members of how things are done and help them to discover where they can fit in the church.
7. Regular opportunities for prayers should be created in the church especially night vigils and prayer retreats.
8. Teaching on stewardship should be organized regularly and practiced in the church.
9. Checks and balances should be put in place particularly in the area of the church finances to ensure accountability. This for example, may include preparing voucher for all expenditures before cheques are issued.
10. Then, the care and welfare of the members should be treated according to agreed laid down guidelines and the pastor too should be also treated as due.
11. A booklet should be compiled and publish as guide to how handle conflict and steps to resolving conflicts in the church. Then it should be available to churches.
12. Drama could be used as a means of preaching peace and the consequences of conflict. Then there could be periodical writings on the need for peace and the disadvantages of conflict. There could be peace day celebration maybe on the anniversary day of the church.

13. There is need for regular evaluation of the church progress and activities which will help to discover areas of needs, neglect and poor performance for improvement. This will help the church know whether she is pursuing her goals and making impact.
14. Spiritual gifts should be discovered in the lives of members and harnessed for the growth of the church.