

**THE CHALLENGES OF PLANTING AND GROWING A
NEW CHURCH: A CASE STUDY OF HALLELLUYAH
BAPTIST CHURCH, AGBAJE, IBADAN.**

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ABSTRACT

The research will be a case study. The first chapter is the general introduction of the essay, including the statement of the problem, the motivation for research, delimitation of the study, methodology, relevance of the study and explanation of operative terms as used in the essay. In the second chapter, church planting and growth methods as used both in the New Testament (Early Church) and contemporary times are examined.

The third chapter focuses on the historical development of the church under study while the fourth chapter makes a critical analysis of the church from 1996 to 2002. The fifth chapter is a critical evaluation of the strength, weakness of the methods being used and factors that pose as challenges. Suggestions for improvement and conclusion are equally the focus of this chapter.

- g. The location of Agbaje area with the river and hill serving as barriers for further development. The hope of future expansion of the area is dim.

Recommendations

This chapter has attempted to identify the areas of weaknesses, strengths and challenges to the planting and growing of Halleluyah Baptist Church, Agbaje, Ibadan. This part of the thesis is devoted to recommendations that will enhance the strengths, remove or reduce the weaknesses and profer solutions to the various challenges:

1. Mother Church Support: Planting entails nurturing. The planting of a church therefore demands that it is given adequate human, material and financial support. The mother church needs to back up the church financially to be able to meet up with the financial demands of a new church.
2. Deliberate Plan for Church Growth: There should be deliberate plan for church growth. Equally, some of the church growth methods identified with the church need to be intensified. Whatever growth strategies are planned for need to be “bathed” with serious prayers. Chester L. Wenger says: “the chronic illness of a non-growing church is lethargy and the symptom is prayerlessness.”¹
3. Church Pastor: There is the need for a substantive pastor who will fully take up the ministry of the church. The present leader who does it on

¹ Chester L. Wenger, “How Churches Grow” in Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth, edited by G. Norman Kraus (Scotdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980), p. 117.

part time is either encouraged to go full time or give way for a full time pastor.

4. Development of Follow-up Strategies: A new convert can only become the right disciple if he is followed up adequately. Some of the follow-up strategies available are:

- (a) Enrolment in the Enquirer's class: It is important that every new member should be mandated to go through the class.
- (b) Membership of Sunday School Class: Each member of the church should not only belong to a Sunday school class but encouraged to attend constantly
- (c) New Member's Sponsor Programmes: This involves assigning of every new member to an older member who is spiritually mature. This member is expected to follow up the person assigned to him/her.
- (d) Guided Bible Study Booklet: Every new member is to be encouraged to go through the programme. The Baptist denomination has such materials as "Follow the Master," "Master Life," "Survival Kit," etc. These useful Bible Study materials are equally available in some indigenous Nigerian Languages.

5. Improved Visitation: The Pastor and departmental leaders should be involved. There should be planned program for visitation. This will foster relationships and no one would be neglected.

6. Indepth Counseling Period: Apart from the follow-up counseling after sermons, the church pastor needs to devote some days in the week for counseling. This is the period members could meet with the Pastor for heart-to-heart discussions on issues of their lives.
7. Concern for the Unchurched: The church members should be trained to develop deep concern for the unchurched. Only then the urge to evangelize will arise in them.
8. Use of Spiritual gifts: The church should emphasize the values of spiritual gifts. This should be through adequate teaching. This will expose members to discover and use their gifts as well as reduce its abuse.
9. There is a need for special training for members on Muslim evangelism.
10. Lastly, urban church growth should include both numerical and spiritual growths. As a results of this, "all growth itself must balance with all other aspects of Christian teaching and practice. Only when the total Christian expression is in balance can there be life and health."²

Conclusion

It is exciting to be involved in the planting and growing of a new church. It is equally exciting to do a deliberate study on its planting and growth. This is more so that the author's involvement at the early life of the church was as a lay-leader. This thesis has attempted to examine Halleluyah Baptist Church,

² Francis M. Dobose, How Churches Grow in an Urban World. (Nashville Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1998), p. 133.

Agbaje, Ibadan in the mirror of church growth methods. It has equally examined the challenges that faced the church in its early life.

Halleluyah Baptist Church has not experienced accelerated growth. It is as if the church has proved resistant to church growth strategies. It has its peculiar problems and these are the factors that militate against its accelerated growth. It is, however, interesting to note that the church possesses the potentials for growth if such (potentials) are adequately explored and exploited.

This is because as in the word of the Lord Jesus, “the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few” (Matthew 9:37, RSV). It is the hope of this writer that the “Lord of harvest” will send “labourers to His harvest” (Matthew 9: 38 RSV). Halleluyah Baptist Church, is like the proverbial mustard seed – “it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nest in its branches” (Matt. 13: 32, RSV).

It is therefore hoped that as the recommendations are implemented, the church will not only grow to its full potential but also start to plant churches. Also pastors and others interested in planting and growing of churches have a lot to learn from the experience of Halleluyah Baptist Church.