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CHURCH / PASTOR CONFLICTS: A CASE STUDY OF TWO
CHURCHES IN OSUN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is a phenomenon, which is vehemently detested in a community. Some see it as being absolutely evil and therefore a handiwork of the devil. Others see it as a thing that should be prayed against especially in the church of God. However, the happenings in our denomination clearly confirm that conflict do generate in our churches in spite of all seemingly careful resistance often been displayed by people.

The concern of this paper is about the conflicts between the church and her pastor. This findings will basically center on the causes and the effects of it on the church, the pastors involved, the association, the conference and of course the convention. On many occasions, these conflicts have led to an uncurbed crisis, which has made things to fall apart between the church and their pastors.

In this study, the writer will attempt to understand the concept of conflict, the causes of conflicts generally and the Biblical approach to conflict. On a specific note, investigation shall be carried out on what caused conflict in the two churches and the effects it had on them.

CONCLUSION

Without any gainsaying, it could be easily deduced from the findings of this work so far that conflict between churches and pastors in Osun Conference Baptist Conference of the Nigerian Baptist Convention is real. The results depicts obviously that these conflicts are caused by many factors which in the context of this paper are referred to as issues. Moreover, the fact

that whenever this conflict happens, it always leaves some dents which could either be positive or negative on the churches and their pastors.

The research clearly showed that conflict itself is not an end to itself, but a means to an end. Therefore, as bad and unwanted as it is, it could still be *managed or controlled in order to yield positive outcomes both to the church and the pastor*. A point to be noted at this junction is that conflict is *inevitable wherever there are more than one person, moreso in a congregation of people from different backgrounds and status as a church*. If that is the case, ways to prevent conflicts between church and their pastors will be necessary in this chapter.

The above may be necessary because research has shown that a great percentage of the church and pastor conflicts in our churches do go unresolved in a biblical pattern that is, resolution. Pastors have been set packing in hostility and on some occasion some pastors in turn have cursed, abused or hated their church members as a result of this unresolved conflicts.

In conclusion, Ross refers to a report in H.B. London and Neil Wiseman's book, Pastors at Risk which contains the results of a 1991 survey of pastors account by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth in the United State to corroborate the fact that conflicts between church and pastor are not only limited to the Nigerian Baptist Convention but it is worldwide, he said,

75% reported a serious stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry 40% reported a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month

90% felt inadequate to cope with the demands of the ministry.⁵

This account clearly shows that ministerial conflict is inevitable and unlimited to any part of the world. The conclusion of the account is that in the previous three months to the time, 40% of the pastors had contemplated leaving the ministry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the aforementioned facts, some recommendations are being made in this paper. This is out a desire to foster peace, unity and smooth relationship between the church and their shepherds. These shall be highlighted in the following paragraph below,

The first fact that should be emphasized clearly is that, the church and their pastor should understand each other. Nobody is perfect no matter how spiritual hence there is no sinless saint. Each of the party should expect any criticism from anybody because nobody is above mistake. The church reacts negatively in a sharp manner to their pastor's misdeeds mostly because they see them as infallible or extra-ordinary. So, when anything happens, they allow it to control their unguided reactions.

The church should also obey the word of God by loving, respecting and caring for their pastors. In most occasions, the church wants to always be at the receiving end. The flock wants to be cared for, loved and respected by the pastor but they deny the man of God of this honour and privilege.

⁵ Ross Campbell, "Ministers: Victims of Anger", Church Administration 39, March 1997, 36.

The pastors in turn must observe the above mentioned point respect the church members, love and care for them because respect is reciprocal. Pastors should not treat the church members the way they are being treated by them. This is because it is their sole responsibility to care for them. Pastors should take time to care for the flock not because of what they will get but because that is their God ordained mission and they will give account (I Peter 5:1-4)

Unguided autonomy should be carefully checked because it can lead to an abuse of power. Members should be exposed to the true meaning and proper interpretation of Baptist polity, practices and beliefs. Many church members use the autonomy of the church to perpetuate evils and frustrate the God-given vision of the pastor. This could be avoided if we take time to teach the church on this polity and beliefs in order to give room for a peaceful co-existence both among the church members and between the church and their pastor. The case of any unresolved conflict should be reported to the association, they in turn should report any conflict they could not handle to the conference and the conference should not be slack in referring any complex case of conflict that they could not handle to the Convention.

FOR THE PASTORS

Every pastor should study his job description in detail. He should not just be interested in the remuneration that /the church will offer him but also in what he is expected to do. This must be asked for before resuming in the church as their pastor. The pastor should not be full of some ungodly

gimmicks, manipulations and questionable characters that can put their integrities at stake. Pastors are urged to spend time in studying God's words and pray before any major decisions will be taken or presented to the church.

The pastor should not think he is an Island of knowledge and sole fountain of wisdom. In as much as he wants his ideas to be taken for consideration, he should also learn to respect the ideas of the church members. And at any time when it seems as if his ideas are not taken, he should not feel cheat, relegated or disrespect.

The pastor should also be a listener. He should not always be talking. He needs to give a rapt attention to the flock as he listens to their fear, problems and difficulties.

Our theological institution should intensify effort in the aspect of teaching practical church Administration. Many student pastor had distinction in church administration in the school but have just a little knowledge on how to practically administer a local church. Also, pastoral training should be more practical-oriented. For example, how to conduct marriage ceremony, burial, naming and so on should be taught. This is an area which is often being neglected in our theological training. And it has not being yielding positive consequences when pastors get to the field.

Finally, emphasis should be laid on conflict management in our pastoral training. If church and pastor conflict is inevitable, then it could be managed in order to yield good result. Smith observes that "All ministers

contend with the inevitability of conflict. Not all ministers, however, manage it well". No wonder they are often vulnerable to forced termination.

If the pastor, the church, conference and convention know and do what is expected of them cases of church and pastor conflicts will be reduced to a minimal level, and where it happens, it would be well managed in order to yield a pleasant result.