

PASTORAL COUNSELLING : A MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

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By

EZEKIEL ADEMOLA FALADE

ABSTRACT

A considerable number of contemporary ministers' vision is beclouded by selfish and arrogant drive for mere numerical increase in church membership. This misplaced emphasis has duly warranted the adoption of evangelical and mission strategies which adopt manipulation of soul instead of maintenance. Thus they seek 'decisions' to the neglect of discipleship of prospective converts. This gross ministerial disregard for proper nurture of needy persons only merges with the spiritual and socio psychological conflicts and confusions in human experience to produce shadow, flimsy Christian convictions in the confession and expression of faith of the members.. The net result is the raising of dwarf Christians, ineffective and who, in adversely severe circumstances, backslide or drop-out of Christianity. Moreover, where such a church which lacks substantial counseling services struggles to survive, only few members "grow on" without caring to inquire about the spiritual, socio psychological welfare of the "dormant" members. This is hardly a setting for healthy church growth.

It is against this background that this essay treats Pastoral Counseling as a Ministry of the Church. The subject is addressed in light of the understanding of God's mandate to disciple heaven-bound members and pastoral-counsel them. Attention is also given to different practical approaches to the task, and the underlying factors that influence various expressions of the phenomenon.

The essay is concluded with the challenge to ministers to develop a team of disciplined counselors to provide the necessary care and counseling ministry which will lead to quality Christians, matured of souls which God committed to their care.

CONCLUSION

Pastoral Care and Counseling is "an integral part of the church's ministry"²⁸. Its concept and ideals have become "structured in the Christian programme that they must be inbuilt into the total life of the local church."²⁹ Even in churches where Pastoral Counseling is not clearly defined, some measure of Pastoral attention is being administered. The question that every Christian community must face is, "are we really helping people in their times of greatest need?."³⁰ To address this question very well is "to establish priority between quality and quantity"³¹ in church membership. If the church is to fulfill her ministry and the Pastor to make a full proof of his ministry, Pastoral Counseling must be treated as an intrinsic and compulsory part of their mission requiring "a good deal of strategic planning and patient administration"³² among the, local congregation. The Pastoral Counselor must be a man of vision, humble and fully dedicated to the Full Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he maintains décor and integrity in ministry, the congregation under him will be thoroughly furnished unto every good work and be fully grounded in the Word of God. The ministry of the church is not complete without adequate and effective Pastoral Counseling. It is through the avenue of Counseling that members are fully disciplined and baked for the kingdom of God.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Man is a unique creation possessing higher powers than any other creature. His conduct is controlled by thoughts and emotions, by desires and intentions His

²⁸ Rusell Dicks, Principles and Practices of Pastoral Care: Success for Pastoral Counseling Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 70

²⁹ Lloyd Ellis Foster, "Building and Administering a Programme of Pastoral Care" in Pastoral Care ed., by J. Richard Spann (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), p. 57

³⁰ Dicks, Op. cit. p. 70

³¹ Dicks. Ibid.

³² Foster, op. cit. p. 57

actions become the subject of his own and of other men's criticisms. The Pastor's sermons also target same. Man's actions may be judged good or bad, righteous or sinful. It is in this light that man is termed a moral being. But man's morality is shaped by various standards. In Christianity and as members of God's family – the church, the revelation of God in Christ and in the Biblical doctrines form the most powerful force. Those who receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour also receive the Holy Spirit into their hearts. The Pastoral Counselor essentially appeals to the Holy Spirit in the life of members because it is the Holy Spirit who controls the Christians' actions, reactions and inactions.

Since the Holy Spirit is the force of God at work in the church and in the lives of all her members, the Pastor should take advantage of Him. The Pastor, in the first instance is called of God through the Holy Spirit, if he employs and cooperates with Him, he will achieve much. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Counselor. The Pastor therefore needs Him to counsel him as he ministers to people.

It is therefore recommended that every Pastor must not only be called of God but be Holy Spirit filled. He must walk, talk and sleep with this third Person of God head that his counseling ministry will be well established. Counseling ministry of the church becomes a must and hence must be well organized and articulated for the growth of members and for the expansion of the church of God. The best ministry is that which touches individuals within a crowd, and Pastoral Counseling is one. In carrying out his duties, the Pastoral Counselor must be available, disciplined and be able to maintain confidentiality. Self-control is a gift of the Holy Spirit, every Pastor needs it for effective counseling work.