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**THE LOCAL BAPTIST CHURCH AS AN AGENT OF CHILDREN'S
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY
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ABSTRACT

The concern of this study is to research on the factors that are responsible for the “neglect” of children in terms of giving them adequate religious education. This study found out why some local Baptist churches are not adequately serving as agents of religious education of their children. Some of the factors responsible for this inadequacy are: lack of separate places of worship for children, lack of sufficiently trained personnel to head children’s department with a sizeable number of children, children workers not trained, no graded children classes or many churches, no activity areas for preschoolers, many Christian adults not believing that a child can accept Jesus Christ as his / her Lord and saviour, churches not including children’s department in their annual budget.

The pastors and children’s workers within the Nigerian Baptist Churches were interviewed through questionnaire in order to find out the areas where the churches have not been adequately performing their roles as agents of religious education of children.

Through the questionnaires distributed, the pastors and children’s workers highlighted the areas of the need in the children’s ministry of the church as follows: the need for separate place of worship for children, the need for trained pastors to head the children’s department, the need for ministering to children of various age groups and provision of activity areas for preschoolers, the need for the pastors of the churches to play an important role in the religious education of

children in their churches, the need to educate parents on their roles as agents of religious education, the need to increase the number of workers in the children's department to cater for them adequately, the need for children's workers to be trained for the job, the need to grade the children for meaningful teaching learning experiences, the need for the use of teaching aids and the provision of finance to purchase them, the need for children's workers appreciation, the need for parent - teachers forum, the need for the children's workers to be more committed.

The summary of the whole work reveals the shifting roles of parents and of the schools as agents of religions education, which in turn confirms the fact that the church can not afford to fail from being the agent of religious education of children. The researcher gives suggestions and recommendations for meeting the spiritual needs of the children in Baptist churches. To meet these needs:

1. The church pastor should see the children as part of his congregation that he should minister to.
2. The church pastor should recruit and train children's workers that would be godly models for children to imitate.
3. The pastor should educate the church of the need to call a trained pastor to head the children's department, to equip the department with necessary facilities, educate parents regularly, and organize parent - teacher forum.
4. Children's workers should engage themselves in training and retraining to remain current.
5. The church pastor should educate the members on the need to include children's department in the annual budget of the church since effective children's ministry in the church always cost money.

CONCLUSIONS

Children are eager learners, teachable, bendable and humble. They love to listen to stories. The church should be ready to make use of this simple nature of children to minister to them. Children are like fresh fish that is bendable. When a fish becomes dry, bending it may lead to breaking it into pieces.

A Yoruba adage says “kekere lati peka iroko, to ba dagba tan apa ko nii ka a mo” which means an Iroko tree can be pruned when it is young, when it grows old and tall the hand can not reach the branches again. Children that are not trained in the way of the Lord when they are young will become hardened

criminals when they grow up. Children are the churches of today because God wants them to serve Him at their age. He wants their whole life span to be spent in worshipping him. They are the churches of tomorrow to replace their parents in the church in serving God. The children that are led to Christ today will worship Christ when they become adults. The Local Baptist Churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention should be ready to pay all that it will cost them to prevent the church from going into extinction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the research carried out, the following recommendations are made;

1. The church pastor should see the children as part of his congregation that he should minister to. He should go to children's department to minister to them once in a while.
2. The church pastor should recruit and train children's workers where there is none.
3. Children's workers should be godly models for children to imitate. They should be doers of the word and not speakers alone. The children should see Jesus in them.
4. The church pastor should educate the church on the need to call a trained pastor to head children's department where the children are up to 150. If

they are less than 150, enough teachers should be trained to work in their midst.

5. He should educate the members of the church on the need to equip the children's department with necessary facilities that can enhance meaningful teaching – learning experiences.
6. The church Pastor should educate the church members on the need to include children's department in the annual budget of the church.
7. The church Pastor should educate parents regularly on how they can become agents of religious education of their children.
8. Parent – teacher's forum should be a regular feature of the church to encourage spirit of oneness and togetherness between parents and teachers.
9. The church Pastor should encourage the church to put in place the seven (7) activity areas for the effective learning of the preschoolers.
10. The children workers should be encouraged to make themselves available for training and retraining to be on the cutting edge in the children's ministry.
11. Children's workers should periodically be encouraged, motivated and appreciated by the church.