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AN EVALUATION OF THE PROBLEM OF LOW ATTENDANCE OF SUNDAY
EVENING WORSHIP SERVICES IN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN OFFA.

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ABSTRACT

This work investigated and evaluated the factors causing low attendance of Sunday evening worship in Baptist churches in Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State. The purpose of the study was to investigate why people fail to attend Sunday evening worship well despite the good attendance in the morning. The researcher used empirical and descriptive methods with the option of sample survey. The instrument used was a self-designed questionnaire which was validated by the research supervisor. The questionnaire was scrutinized and useful suggestions that assisted in improving the quality and relevance of the questions were given. Below are the findings from the data analyzed. First the members are aware of the low attendance on Sunday evenings worship service in Offa. Second, there are reasons for low attendance on Sunday evenings and majority of the people agreed that the problems can be taken care of by the churches. Third, it was found out that no single reason is strong enough to bring the attendance of the churches down, but the low attendance could be said to be as a result of "Contingency reasons."

On the basis of the findings the researcher recommended the following among others: The churches in Offa are to provide transportation in the evening worship service. Also, the worship leaders should make evening service more interesting involving parishioners, and make it short so as to avoid boredom. Snacks could also be provided to refresh the people on Sunday evening worship service.

5.2 Conclusion

The experience of low attendance to church worship service in the evening is not a new phenomenon. Its origin could be traced to the time the Europeans established Christian worship when gathering only one time was the practice (Ernest 94). The evening worship was a later development and practice is gradually going into oblivion. Some churches that claim to have evening services are merely enduring extinction, while some churches in Offa have replaced Sunday evening worship service with "House Fellowship." My observation is that if house fellowships could function well in the churches where it is being practiced, it is a reflection of inadequacy in the church setting out of which such house fellowships are established.

5.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the recommendations below are made towards improving Sunday evening service attendance. Every aspect of human life is affected by the social, political, economic and religious activities existing in the environment he lives. Those spheres of life affect the way man reacts to issues. The reaction has a bearing on the suitability or otherwise posed by the existing condition. To improve attendance of Sunday evening worship service certain measures have to be taken into consideration. These include: 1 The preacher has to identify the things that can divert the attention of the people in the evening. Such things that can be termed "alternatives to Christianity" (Trueblood 20). Such things like cults, alcoholism and other social activities that are mostly enjoyed in the evening time have to be preached against and their evil effects well spelt out. This will discourage those in the habit of doing them to desist.

2. Every preacher should realize the rise of intellectualism and the challenges it poses on the people. Preachers should try to address the challenges in their morning messages and keep the members in suspense for the concluding aspect of the evening. This could help in bringing worshippers to come for evening worship service.

3. Parishioners' participation could also help to increase the number of worshippers on Sunday evenings. David Haney says that "Church attendance in Europe was as low as 5% of the population of the city." The reason was said to be as a result of "the domination of the clergy" (20). This fact was supported by Jurgen Moltmann when he said, "The work of the church is not the sole responsibility of the clergy; it is the task of all its members" (23). If the parishioners are given chance to

participate in using their spiritual gifts, it could lead to increase in attendance of worship service on Sunday evening.

4. Let there be flexibility in the order of service. Things like special vocal week, instrumental music, short sermon or address and good ushering could bring improvement to attendance on Sunday evening worship. James Hill supported this when he said, "Taking things as we find them, the rigid cast iron type of service need not be adhered to absolutely" (24).

5. Another thing that could lead to sizeable number of attendance of Sunday evening worship service is to make the service as short as possible. If need be traditional protocols have to be omitted to cut down the time. This will encourage members to come.

6. Let there be varieties in the Sunday evening worship. For example, the church can have "night of praise," family forum, night of making request in prayer and a host of attention catching topics. Sunday evening worship can be developed if the church can come up with programmes like "hobby show." Talents among men and women are employed to create interest and sensitize members to various works they can do. These works can be brought "to the church on the appointed Sunday night" (SBC 3). There could also be a time for refreshment. Let the theme of the message be attention catching. For example, it could be called:

- (i) The great night of decision;
- (ii) The great night of betrayal (Matt. 26:14-16);
- (iii) The night of wrestling (Gen. 32:13-34);
- (iv) The night of new beginning (Luke 2:8-14) (SBC).
- (v) The night of freedom from bondage (Acts 16:25-33).

7. The church can as well plan with the societies in the church to be having their meetings an hour before the evening worship service. This will help in bringing a sizeable number of members to the service. By so doing, the pastor should be time-conscious, and make his message relevant to the lives of the people (Hill 64).

8. Pastors need to preach motivational sermons. Sermons that relate to situations on ground will attract listeners. There may be changes in attendance if a pastor preaches a sermon that will bring revolution, and true to life.

9. One of the functions of Christian worship is to maintain the ethical standard of the church and to tell sinners that God is fighting with them to make these functions obtainable, we are "to provide a forum for sharing testimonies of the victory already won for God. In this way, it can inspire us to new heights of service and witness" (Susan 7).

10. The church may experience large number of attendance on Sunday evening if the spiritual and physical expectations of the people are met. Real fellowship in apostolic time involved the breaking of bread. If we cannot involve the breaking of bread in the morning, it may help the church if it could be considered in the evening. This falls in line with what Lloyd John Ogilvie said that "Most of us go to church for what we can get out of it . . . as long as it provides something or our carefully defined expectation, we will participate in it and support it. When it doesn't, we use the power of the pledge and lack of attendance to express disapproval" (61).

11. The church should also realize that modern day Christians have no time for numerous activities the church is displaying almost every Sunday. What they need is productivity, improvement on their lives and work. This situation in our churches

makes Hines B. Eugene to observe that, "We are in fact living a second hand and second rate Christianity. We think we can buy our way into relationship with God by activity" (17). If the church can cut down the activities and have short and meaningful services members may be encouraged to attend both in the morning and evening.

12. The church should rise to address the needs of the people. We clamour for people's spiritual needs, but we forget to address their other needs like material, social and financial needs. The church could maintain the attendance record of the morning worship service in the evening if the worshippers' needs are adequately addressed. Tidwell A. Charles therefore, observed that, "It is contradictory to profess to have concern for man's spiritual needs and not be sensitive to his other needs" (63). Tidwell further suggested that "the use of church training could help in enhancing attendance in the Sunday evening service" (146), but one needs to realize that many churches that are involved in Church Training are still experiencing low attendance on Sunday evening worship service. The most important thing to do could be to address the various needs of the members. When the needs are met, there could be positive change in attendance on Sunday evening worship service.

13. Churches are advised to intensify effort towards using Sunday evenings for evangelism. Let there be a serious advertisement of programmes (Worship Experience for Church)

14. Vehicles could also be made available in the evening to carry church members to their various locations in the evening. Many people are finding it difficult to secure transportation to their homes in the evenings.

15. It is also advisable to have short service in the evening so as to avoid boredom.

16. Let the church provide snacks for refreshment on Sunday evening to meet the physical needs of the people.

17. Further research needs to be done to find out if dividing the church members into age brackets could enhance high turn up of members both in the morning and evening worship services.