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**DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME**

**AS A CORRELATE OF CHURCH**

**GROWTH.**

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## B. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a matter of necessity, the following recommendations are offered in order to guide the local church leadership in their efforts in discipleship. These recommendations are the products of the researchers applications of biblical and theoretical knowledge with day to day experiences in the church.

### 1. Create an atmosphere for Discipleship.

If shepherding is more exacting than mere fishing, discipleship as a compulsory trend in the Church will not come by itself. It must be planned for and the right environment for it must be created before it can be run successfully. In creating an enabling environment for discipleship, freedom is the bedrock. Create awareness freely, invite people freely, enrol them freely, not against their own wish or just to please you. The examples of Jesus is that although He challenged and called men to follow Him, into discipleship, He did not force a man to follow Him who by act of his own will decide not to do so. He allowed men to freely make their own decisions. He did not plead with anyone to change his mind, for example, the rich young ruler. (Mark 10:17-27). It is not profitable to cajole or force a man into a commitment who is not prepared by the Holy Spirit to be committed to a higher level of involvement. The result of this kind of pressure could force frustration or possibly push an individual farther from the Lord. Instead, the discipler should be sensitive to the disciple's actual level of commitment and increase opportunities for involvement by an attitude of encouragement. The Discipler should not excite them either, for those who make decisions in excitement renege when the excitement is over.

## 2. **Institutionalize Discipleship into Church Life**

Discipleship should run in a cycle if it is to be successful. There are various levels of training. From new converts training to stewardship and devotional guide and so on, the disciple should also become a discipler. (II Tim. 2:2). Therefore, the programmes of discipleship should be built into the life of the Church just as prayer meeting, Bible Study, Sunday School, choir practice have specific time weekly on the church schedule of activities. This will create awareness and opportunities for participants. There are churches that allot such time and resources to discipleship training that many members freely participate in it. This will make the structure of the Church not only to be based on small social groups (societies) in the church with little or nothing to develop spirituality in members.

## 3. **Be thirsty for Growth.**

Since growth is essential if the church is to fulfil the Great Commission, the church should not just fantasize about growth but plan for it aggressively. For this reason, depending on growth by generation and transfer should not be satisfactory to the church. The church should plan for evangelism, train members to witness and win souls. As a new soul is won, the church should strike the rod while it is hot by discipling the new convert. Such new convert still have natural bridges to the unsaved and the unchurched who are either their friends, acquaintances or even family members, thus bringing with them a potential multiplication table. Some are won through the new converts and they are disciplined again in a continuous cycle.

#### 4. Develop Church-Based Discipleship Training Manuals

While several training materials are available for discipleship, it is planless, which will snuff life out of discipleship training if any is used without due or proper adaptation. The church knowing its need and the background of the converts should develop materials that will be suitable to them. This will go a long way to make the programme relevant in the church.

#### 5. Address Growth Restricting Obstacles

Those churches where discipleship is not organized or where it was discontinued may have come against obstacles and problems against the programme. Therefore, there is need to address several problems that will militate against it early enough, such obstacles include:

- i. **Polygamy:** Those who are already polygamous, where do they come in to be part of the programme.
- ii. **Planlessness:** Where there is no advanced planning with organized, serialized lesson, each period of training will not be stimulating.
- iii. **Success Syndrome:** Some churches are basking in the glory of having several thousands of people who are already in the church. Such may be tempted not to consciously plan for growth. This is in spite of several unbelievers who have not been reached within the vicinity of the church.
- iv. **Controversy:** If the pulpit is used to address controversial issues such as politics, theological debates and so on, even when we talk of discipleship, people may begin to see it as controversial issue.
- v. **Boredom:** Where the programme... to the needs of the disciples and the church and stimulating by proper handling on the part of disciplers, people will be fired of it

## 6. Disciple illiterate Christians

Literacy is a legacy that endears people to training and knowledge. The literate can quickly adapt to discipleship no doubt, but the illiterates are also in the church, especially in the sub-urban churches. They can be trained in discipleship as well. Everybody has the capacity to understand the will of God and we should note that illiteracy is not synonymous with ignorance or lack of wisdom. Janvier George suggests the following approach to incorporate illiterates into discipleship.

- i. Develop relationship with them.
- ii. Teach in the context of life.
- iii. Do Bible memorization. Do not force them to recite in exact words.
- iv. Read and explain the texts.<sup>2</sup>

## 7. Pastor should give more priority to their roles as disciplers

It is evident from the life of many pastors that they are not aware of their role in discipling. They just preach and perform ceremonies of different types. Since many of them were not disciplined, the concept is foreign to them and they are lacking in skills necessary to manage discipleship programme to a meaningful end. They are too general in their service. Many erroneously believe that their sermons and the Sunday School content is enough a discipleship programme. The truth is that the sermon and the Sunday School and indeed everything done in the church can not be fully understood and beneficial to an undisciplined soul.

To be successful as a discipler, the writer recommends these suggestions to the pastor –

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<sup>2</sup> Janvier George. *Discipleship: A West African Perspective.* (Nigeria. Baraka Press and Publisher Ltd., 1993), pp. 90-92.

- i. Create awareness of the programme and invite participants.
- ii. Use time to train immediate assistance and church officers,
- iii. Use the apprenticeship model by giving examples for others to follow,
- iv. Plan the programmes well,
- v. Do not handle a number that is too large at a time,
- vi. Refuse to be discouraged.<sup>3</sup>