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DEVELOPING A FOLLOW-UP STRATEGY MANUAL FOR ASSIMILATION OF
NEW MEMBERS INTO IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH, OJO, LAGOS

A PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
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ABSTRACT

This project is titled: "Developing a Follow-up Strategy Manual for the Assimilation of New Members into Immanuel Baptist Church, Ojo." The purpose was to examine reasons why people who come to indicate willingness to join the membership of a church leave within a short time; identify effective follow-up strategy that could be used in assimilating the prospective members into the fellowship of the church; educate the church members about the role they have to play in assimilation of new members into the fellowship of the church; and produce and test run a follow-up strategy manual that could be used for assimilation of new members into a local church. The population of the project consisted of Church Council members and workers of Immanuel Baptist Church, Ojo, Lagos, with pastors and members of sixteen (16) other churches of the New Life Baptist Association, Lagos. The participants from Immanuel Baptist Church, Ojo, formed the primary participants. The manual produced was implemented in five teaching sessions taught by the researcher on five Sundays. Each session lasted for about two hours. Pre-test questionnaire was administered before the teaching while post-test questionnaire was administered after the teaching. In all, 83 returned the pre-test questionnaire while 81 returned the post-test questionnaire. From the pre-test questionnaire, it was discovered that many churches do not have enough guests for growth because members do not invite their friends and neighbours to their churches; many Baptist churches do not have New Members Class; they do not use their small groups for assimilation. The post-test questionnaire showed that participants had gained some insight on how to solve the problem of follow-up and assimilation of new members. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Baptist Churches need to work on attracting guests to their churches; pastors should encourage their members to be more proactive in inviting their friends and neighbours to their local churches; small groups, such as the Sunday School, in Baptist Churches should be re-organized to create room for relationship that is needed for assimilation of new members. Furthermore, churches should set up New Members Class as medium of communicating church's expectation to new members. The Publication Department of the Nigerian Baptist Convention should develop a simple and short manual for use in the New Members Class.

Conclusion

From this project, it is clear that though assimilation is an ancient and universal problem, it is not a problem without solution. All that is needed is an effective follow-up strategy. The only challenge is that the strategy must be home-grown because there is no universal strategy that can work in every situation – the unique history, culture and growth rate of each congregation influence the assimilation plan that is best for her. In developing a workable follow-up strategy for assimilation there are four basic principles that could be used. These principles are: expectation, ministry involvement, relationship and small groups.

From the pre-test questionnaire, it was discovered that many Baptist churches do not have New Members Class where they communicate their expectations of the members to them before joining the church. It was also discovered that although many Baptist churches have small groups such as Sunday School, Sunbeam, Girls Auxiliary, Royal Ambassadors, Lydia, Youth Fellowship, Baptist Student Fellowship (BSF) etc these small groups are not relational and so they are not helping in the task of assimilation. There is need to make these groups relational so that they can be useful for assimilation of new members.

The study revealed that the importance of members' involvement in the task of follow-up and assimilation cannot be over emphasised. They have to invite their unchurched friends and neighbours to the church, as well as, lead in the task of follow-up. The pre-test however revealed that many church members do not invite their friends and neighbours to their churches; this does not give churches enough guests that could be followed-up for assimilation.

From the analysis of the pre-test and post-test questionnaires of the project, it was clear that the objectives of this project were achieved. For example through the teaching of the manual, the pastors, church workers and church members became more knowledgeable about how to solve the problem of follow-up and assimilation of new members. They believed that applying the principles learnt will help in solving the problem of follow-up and assimilation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

5. There is need for Baptist Churches to work on attracting guests to their churches. Many Baptist churches do not have sign posts, many churches, especially in Lagos, do not have car parks etc., whereas these are essential in attracting guests to churches. Moreover, pastors should encourage their members to be more proactive in inviting their friends and neighbours to their local churches in order to increase the number of prospective members.
6. Small groups were identified as one of the principles for assimilation. This study revealed that Baptist churches have many small groups but the small groups are not helping in assimilation of new members because they are not relational. They are

more of equipping small groups. But there is need to make the small groups more relational. If they are made more relational, they will not only help in assimilating new members, but they will also be more effective in their equipping goal.

7. The study revealed the importance of communicating church's expectation to new members before actually admitting them into the membership of the church. This is expected to be done through New Members Class. But many Baptist Churches do not have New Members Class. There is need for Baptist churches to have New Members Class where new members will be given orientation of what the church would expect from them when they become members.
8. To help small churches of the Convention, the Publication Department of the Nigerian Baptist Convention should develop a manual for use in the New Members Class just as they did for New Believers' Class and the Baptismal Class. The manual should be simple and short not taking more than eleven weeks. The content may include the following:
 - a. The church and her purposes
 - b. The meaning of church membership
 - c. The requirements, values and benefits of church membership
 - d. The responsibilities of members
 - e. Church Ministries and how members can be involved.
9. There is need for a separate study on the use of Baptist small groups for follow-up and assimilation of new members. This is to throw more light on how the small groups can be organized for the purpose of assimilation of new members.