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UNITY OF THE CHURCH:
A CATALYST FOR CHURCH GROWTH IN WARRI BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

The church is the gathering of the believers in Jesus Christ. The church consists of all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, regardless of their race, nationality, denomination and status in life. Church is an extended family of God on earth, because the members of the church are the children of God and God is their father. The church is the largest extended family of God on earth. Jesus Christ, the founder, head and sustainer empowers his church with different gifts to continue the work of missions on earth. Unity is indispensable among the members of church to do the work of missions. However, disunity comes into the church and truncates her mission efforts. This satanic instrument comes into the church as a result of unregenerated church membership, indigenization sentiments, discipline of immoral conducts, misappropriation of church money and poor relationship between pastors and church members. The destructive impact of disunity among the local Baptist Churches of Warri Baptist Association and other contexts which affects the growth of church is the great motivation for this work. Therefore, this study: Unity of the Church: a Catalyst for Church Growth in Warri Baptist Association examined biblical supports of the unity of the church, catholic and protestant views of the church unity and church growth from the biblical point of view. This study is empirical in nature and researcher employed questionnaire to carry out the work. Data were gathered and analyzed with simple percentile method. The findings were discussed and encouraged its adequate implementations and practices in Warri Baptist Association and other contexts to safe guard the unity of church. Based on the study, unity of the church is not what Christians created by themselves but Jesus the head of church established it and sustains it by the power of Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for the unity of the church so the world would believe that God sent His son to be the saviour of the world. The unity of the church in Warri Baptist Association will enhance the growth of church to expand the kingdom of God. On the basis of this, it was recommended among others that, the church should educate her members on the prospects of the unity of the church. The Christians should practice the virtue of tolerance, humility and acceptability as factors of promoting the unity and growth of the church.

knowledgeable and grow in the Lord. This will curb disunity which could lead to church crisis. Disunity is a satanic instrument that truncates the growth of church and every Christian should guide against it. Therefore, the local baptist churches of Warri Baptist Association should allow the leadership of Holy Spirit and supremacy of the scripture in their faith and practices. This will make the local churches to grow and fulfill divine mandate on earth.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Church is the gathering of believers in Christ Jesus with all their differences. All christians are one in the body of Christ. This is because Christ Jesus is the common saviour and Lord of the church. Church as the body of Christ is called to expand the kingdom of God on earth. Every part of the body has its distinctive function. It is impossible to divide any function from the rest. Each part is depended in the whole body. Thus, every function of church members is interrelated. All church members should play their roles effectively to nourish the church, the body of Christ on earth.

Church members must realize that they cannot touch any part of the church's body without affecting the whole body. Disunity affects the whole church, including her works of missions and lives of individual members. Unity of the church is not something to be created by christians but it must be protected and promoted by all Christians through the power of Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for the unity of the church so that world would believe that God sent His son to be the saviour of the world.

It is required of all christians and local baptist churches of Warri Baptist Association and other contexts to practice Christians love which prevails over insults and injuries from fellow brethren. Speaking the truth lovingly in their social and

personal relationship with one another. Humility, tolerance, acceptability and cordial relationship to God and between fellow brethren should be appropriate to sustain the unity of the church. This will make the church to be nourished and grow to expand the kingdom of God on earth.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has examined the concepts of the unity of the church, factors that promote the unity of the church and its outcomes. The biblical bases of church growth were also examined. The work encouraged the practice of biblical views of the unity of the church and church growth into the context of Warri Baptist Association. The followings are recommendations with the hope that if properly and strictly implemented, the unity of the church will be promoted among the local Baptist churches and enhances the church growth to expand God's kingdom on earth.

Individual Christians

- (1) The unity among Christians was created within the church by the Holy Spirit. Thus, christians should maintain peaceful relationship with one another by resolving amicably difficulties and disagreement among them.
- (2) No matter the level of disagreement, no member of the body of Christ should be the instrument by which disunity will come into the church.
- (3) The sincere love should be allowed among the brethren to prevail over the insults and mistakes of other brethren.
- (4) The christians should practice the virtue of tolerance, humility and acceptability as factors of promoting the unity and growth of the church.

Church

- (1) The church should educate her members on the biblical position of the unity of the church. Adequate teachings on the divine prospects of the unity of the church will curb disunity among the church members .
- (2) It is imperative for the church to protect her integrity through unity of the purpose in diversity to expand the kingdom of God on earth.
- (3) The Church should avoid bias and sentiment in all her activities.

Church Leaders

- (1) Disunity is a satanic strategy to paralyze the church growth. Therefore, the church leaders should be sensitive to the causes and do their best to curb it at the primary stage.
- (2) The church leaders should promote the unity of the church among the church members through their exemplary ways of life, cordial relationship to God and fellow brethren.
- (3) Academic and theological institutions disparity among the pastors should be discouraged. Individual pastors should be committed to what God entrusted to them.