

EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELLING MINISTRY IN SELECTED NIGERIAN BAPTIST
CHURCHES IN ORISUN AYO ASSOCIATION, IBADAN

A DEGREE ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGICAL
STUDIES OF NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA. IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF DIVINITY IN THEOLOGY

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MATRIC NO: 11/0010

JUNE, 2016

ABSTRACT

The research focused on the effectiveness of counselling ministry in selected Baptist churches in Orisun Ayo Baptist Association, Ibadan. The descriptive study used one-hundred and eighty randomly selected church members from six (6) organized Baptist churches in the Association. The main instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire Scale designed by the researcher. Four main research questions were raised for the study. The findings revealed that: Counselling services are moderately available and effective in Nigerian Baptist churches; Baptist church members have positive attitudes towards seeking help through counselling from the pastor and no known impediments/problems hinder members from seeking counselling from the pastor. It was recommended that church pastors should be more readily available to offer to members this sacred service of healing wounds and that church members should avail themselves of the opportunities of gaining godly counsel from the pastor in times of need.

Conclusion

This research affirmed that counselling is a common phenomenon in the Nigerian Baptist Convention churches. Thus, church pastors should know that being human; members have several needs which could be spiritual, emotional, physical, social and so on, which most of the times are not met through the pastor's preaching. When these needs are not

met, church members look frustrated, mal-adjusted and worn out; worshipping and serving God in such state becomes very difficult because 'heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad' (Prov. 12:5).

Many church members come to church with very heavy heart, hoping that their burdens will be taken away. Unfortunately, most often these situations remain the same because no one cares to ask or share his/her burden. Being hurt is a reality in the church today and many issues that could be handled at the early stage always develop into serious problems because there not enough competent counsellors to help. Being hurt prevents people from reaching their full potentials spiritually, physically, mentally and psychologically.

In the words of Omojola (1996), counselling is very vital to the ministry of the church. Through it, individual members can reach each other with the help needed to reduce the level of hurt and thus be freed to experience growth and self development. This was corroborated by Selwyn Hughes when he said that 'helping people with their problems is not just the task of professional counsellors, it is the commission of every Christian also. Whether we realize it or not almost all of us are involved in counselling situations every day of our lives....' (Hughes, 1982:10).

The study treated counselling as a church ministry that can unlock the virtues and potentialities of members and thereby release them to serve God without walls or hindrances and ultimately make church members to fully understand themselves and become useful and effective in their service to God. The research findings therefore conclude thus:

1. Counselling services exist in most Nigerian Baptist churches. It is now left to members to avail themselves with the opportunity of utilizing this great ministry to become more effective in their services to God.

2. To a great extent, counselling ministry is effective in most Nigerian Baptist churches because it is having positive impacts on members' lives. Many pastors as a result of their training in introductory Pastoral Care and Counselling are alive to their responsibilities of tending the flock of God by caring for their needs.
3. Baptist church members are positive in their attitudes towards seeking help from the pastor/counsellor. Instead of being tossed 'to and fro' by winds of confusion, members believe in seeking God's direction through counselling by the pastor. It is not enough to read and understand the Bible; every church member needs someone to care for him/her.
4. Most pastors in Nigerian Baptist churches are people of integrity who can keep confidence and approachable. Church members therefore have no need to fear approaching their pastors because they are trained in the art of giving Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) to church members. The pastors have incorporated counselling into their ministry.

Recommendations

Meeting the counselling needs of Nigerian Baptist church members is a great task that must be done if members are to fully realise their potentials and serve God without any unnecessary burden. Having discussed the heart of God as touching meeting the counselling needs of church members in Baptist churches, the church's counselling ministry should be handled in the church in the light of the following recommendations:

1. Counselling services should be made readily more available to church members through the pastor's availability at all times when their services are required by members.
2. The pastor can have a counselling unit that will meet regularly and help in meeting the needs of members. The pastor must however be the head of this

unit and must ensure that members of the unit are people of integrity and trusted individuals who can keep secrets.

3. In cases where the church operates a multi-staff model of ministry, a pastor can be saddled with the responsibility of handling the counselling services with the supervision of the senior pastor.
4. Pastors should work on their integrity so that members can easily approach them and seek for help knowing fully that they are safe in their pastor's hands.
5. Baptist church members should explore the opportunity of counselling services available in their churches instead of seeking help from several 'mountains' and miracle centres.