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IMPACT OF PASTORAL COUNSELING ON CHURCH GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This work is on the study of the impact of pastoral counseling on church growth and development. It was discovered that the impact of pastoral counseling on church growth and development of Baptist Churches in Nigeria cannot be ever emphasized.

The objective of this essay is to bring to the knowledge of the pastors the importance of counseling in the local church. The aim is to motivate local church pastors to see pastoral counseling as a ministry of the church. This essay intends to examine pastoral counseling and its effectiveness in development and growing of a church. This is necessary in order to study the impact that pastoral counseling has on the church membership and growth. The researcher discovered that counseling methods vary from directive method, non-directive method to identification while the purposes of the church are healing, guiding, sustaining, reconciling, educating and nurturing. More so, it was discovered that pastoral counseling is very relevant in marriage, crisis management, conflict resolution, family enrichment, social systems while the functions of pastoral counseling are supportive care and counseling, educative guidance, preventive guidance and crisis management.

In order to handle church crises effectively, the writer recommends the following guidelines: Firstly, know yourself: Some pastors imitate others by attempting to do what they are not gifted by the Holy Spirit to do which often results into problem in the church. Secondly, be sure in your Pastoral Ministry: sincerity sustains the pastor's prestige in his ministry. Insincerity is hypocritical, and when it is discovered by the congregation, the chord of love binding the Pastor and the church is broken. Thirdly, seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit in any problem resolution: The pastor should not relent in his effort to pray fervently, seeking the leadership of God the father, Jesus Christ the son and the Holy Spirit the counselor, without which no solution may be arrived at. Fourth, know the problem at stake: There are church problems as well as pastoral problems. The pastor should identify the problems into which group problems belong before trying to solve them. In fact, if the problem is that of the church, the pastor should lead the church to solve it, rather than trying to solve it personally. If the problem is personal, the pastor should not shift it to the church for settlement. Finally, handle every conflict with Care: This amicable style of resolution is recommended by Jesus Christ in the scripture.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that pastoral counseling remains as an aid to church growth and development. It is a tool on its own to boost the growth of the church. However, no matter the level of performance of the church in other ministries when counseling ministry is missing this will definitely lead the church to experience setback. To guide against embarrassment that may arise such as poor attendance, idleness irregular payment of tithes and offerings and so on, there is need for pastors and church members to see pastoral counseling as a remedy to these effects.

In the same vein, it reveals that pastoral counseling is very much important in the church. It is examined from the study that proper coordination of pastoral care and counseling in the churches used as sample has helped both the pastor and church members to gain good relationship in family, church and society.

On the other hand, pastors are encouraged to demonstrate their skills and at the same time to intensify their counseling efforts so as to guide against lapses that may occurred which will not help the church to growth. In this connection, there is the need to recall that a church growth as God works through Christians who labour to add to her those who are saved through Jesus Christ, equipping them for responsible matured members. As members of a church band to have problems in life such as physical, social, marital, moral or spiritual crises, growth can be gravely hindered and stagnated without counseling intervention. The purpose of pastoral counseling therefore in this situation is to help counselee open his or her eyes to discover ways by which problems can be solved by themselves. In all of this, the goal of pastoral counseling majorly is to lead counselee to Christ.

Finally, an effective church growth and development will be fostered and attainable only by careful application of the pastoral relationship between pastors and church members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to handle church crises effectively, the writer recommends the following guidelines:

1. Know yourself: Some pastors imitate others by attempting to do what they are not gifted by the Holy Spirit to do. This attitude often results into problem in the church

2. Be sure in your Pastoral Ministry: Sincerity sustain the pastor's prestige in his ministry. Insincerity is hypocritical, and when it is discovered by the congregation, the chord of love binding the Pastor and the church is broken.
3. Seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit in any problem resolution: The pastor should not relent in his effort to pray fervently, seeking the leadership of God the father, Jesus Christ the son and the Holy Spirit the counselor, without which no solution may be arrived at.
4. Know the problem at stake: There are church problems as well as pastoral problems. The pastor should identify the problems into which group problems belong before trying to solve them. In fact problem is that of the church, the pastor should lead the church to solve it, rather than trying to solve it personally. If the problem is personal, the pastor should not shift it to the church for settlement.
5. Handle every conflict with Care: This amicable style of resolution is recommended by Jesus Christ in the scripture.

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listen to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others with you... if the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offends refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17, NRSV).

With this methods of solution, you are playing the role of your brother's keeper.