

THE ROLE OF EVANGELISM FOR CHURCH GROWTH
(A CASE STUDY OF BETHEL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION IN
OGBOMOSO BAPTIST CONFERENCE)

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ABSTRACT

The researcher dealt greatly with critical examination on "The Role of Evangelism in Church Growth in Bethel Baptist Association." There are enlightenment and encouragement on the growth of the church especially in this century (21st century).

In obedience to the command of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19 & 20; evangelism is generally recognized and acceptable as an instrument in the hand of church for church growth if it is well-organized and practiced regularly and frequently. As an heartbeat of God, the immense benefit of evangelism across the ages, requires extensive use in which churches can experience increase in their membership, church extension, nurturing, maturing, fulfilling of the great commission and exhibition of spiritual gifts.

The church as a living organism is subject to growth from the efforts of individual church members and church pastors. The need for church to grow conceptually, organically, spiritually and numerically are emphasized. The fact remains that church growth stands as outcome of well organized evangelism within and outside the church premises. The growth of the church was the aim of Jesus Christ with the mind of kingdom expansion on earth. Obviously, churches in Bethel Baptist Association in Ogbomoso Baptist Conference experience such growth in the last five years.

5.2 Conclusion

From the critical examination, one would believe that evangelism has great role on the church growth in this 21st century.

The role of evangelism in church growth could be examined in the following areas: (1) increase in church membership, (2) fulfilling of the great commission, (3) spiritual maturity and nurturing among church members, (4) exhibition of spiritual gifts in their church for edification of the body of Jesus Christ, (5) extension of church building as a result of increase in the church membership, and (6) church planting in the newly developed areas where their church members relocated to.

The study reveals that evangelism is a life-cycled process which is rewarded on the earth and in the heavens if it is carried out whole heartedly (1Cor. 15:58; Rev. 22:11, 12). Church members should be enlightened to know that evangelism is a God-venture and it needs to be carried out with human passion. In the same vein, pastors should take evangelism as the major task of their pastoral ministries. Of course, if church evangelism would bring about great role on church growth, evangelism coordinators must cooperate with and responsible to church pastors. However, evangelism report must be written and given adequate attention, and evaluation on evangelism/church

growth must be examined. Proper record on evangelism must be kept and reviewed regularly for improvement.

All churches should show, know and understand the characteristics of this 21st century. Both positive and negative characteristics must encourage and enhance effective evangelism. Information and communication technology advancement needs to be used in the evangelism and for the church growth. Church must know that the end-time is moving closer everyday, so it is a sign for the church to arise for end-time harvest through evangelism.

Therefore, evangelism would be responsible as a factor for church growth, and every church is embedded with growth potentials. "The church as the body of Christ and every household of faith is endowed with divine treasures. It is gifted with people who have all it takes to make the church fulfill its divine mandate" (Olawuyi, 43). The present condition of the church calls for aggressive and dynamism in evangelism approaches, in building believers to be God's ambassadors in this perverted world.

5.3 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the study of Baptist Pastors, church evangelism coordinators, local Baptist churches of Bethel Baptist Association in Ogbomosho Baptist Conference. These are the stakeholders within the Baptist denomination who can determine effectiveness and efficiency of evangelism as a factor for church growth in this 21st century.

1. There is the need for Baptist pastors to be evangelistic and mission minded. Pastors should always plan for evangelism every year. Evangelistic outreach should be organized and carry out weekly instead of monthly or quarterly in order to be more faithful and committed to the kingdom assignment.
2. Church Pastors also must be involved and participate fully in evangelism in order to encourage church members to see it as great tasks of the church.
3. More evangelism and church growth materials should be produced and made available in the church. It is advisable that the materials are written in vernacular language so that the less-schooled people can also benefit from the materials.
4. Church members should be well enlightened about evangelism and church growth. There should be a good communication system that will enhance proper understanding of some of the concepts related to evangelism and church growth.
5. Churches and conferences should frequently organize seminars, retreats, conferences and workshops on evangelism and church growth in order to facilitate interest, and empower church members to participate in them.
6. People should be encouraged to give willingly to support the programme rather than levying that may result in lack of commitment on the part of the members.

7. Mission and evangelism emphasis week, at least, in a quarter should be encouraged for evaluation, equipping of church members and also for contribution for the programme.
8. The Evangelism Units or departments in local churches, associations, and conferences should be adequately provided with funds, materials, and enough personnel that will help in the area of evangelism and church growth.
9. Church policy and leadership style should be fashioned and structured to encourage church members to participate adequately in evangelism programmes.
10. Each church should set-up Evangelism Team and Visitation Unit in order to enhance visitation and follow-up of the visitors and newly converted members.
11. Local churches should also organize enquirers' class or converts' class for spiritual growth of the new converts. It should be organized on weekly basis in order to educate church members. Discipleship programme materials may be used.
12. Home Cell/House Fellowship materials should meet the need of the members for spiritual development in order to enhance adequate growth both physically and spiritually maturity.