

THE PARTICIPATION OF SELECTED BAPTIST CHURCHES IN IBARAPA AREA
IN MISSIONS: 1948-2010

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ABSTRACT

A New Testament church has been defined as a body of believers, baptized upon their profession of faith in Jesus Christ, who have joined together voluntarily with the Holy Spirit for the purpose of promoting Christ's redemptive purposes for humanity. The primary task of a church, as revealed in the definition, is to carry out the reconciliatory agenda of God fulfilled in Christ Jesus. The roles of the church in missions have been summed up to mobilize, pray, give and go. This thesis probed into the participation of the selected churches in Ibarapa area in missions related activities between 1948 and 2010. It considers the going and the supporting efforts of the churches. The research was carried out by means of historical analysis. The research tools employed included library materials, church historical records, Oyo West Baptist Conference book of Reports, Church diaries and oral interview. The research revealed that the churches are involved in one missions related activity or the other. It was however discovered that the churches are weak in oral proclamation of the gospel. The researcher also discovered that many of the early churches planted were not as a result of the missionary efforts of the mother churches but was consequent to a split because of crisis. The research further revealed that the missionary sending and supporting efforts of the churches is poor. None of the churches has one time identified, trained and sent a missionary to an unreached people group. Instead, they depended on the co-operative missionary sending efforts of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The financial contribution of many of the churches to missions was also based on the 20% contribution to the co-operative programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The research therefore recommends that one, there is need for Pastors to engage in missionary preaching and teachings. Two, observance of a monthly missions awareness day will be of help. Three, every local church needs to have and work through a mission statement. Four, the church should give missions tasks to the missionary organizations. Five, every local church should develop a budget for missions annually. Six, there is need for every Church to have a Missions and Outreach minister. Seven, there is need to re-orientate the mission committees of churches on their responsibilities.

5.2 Conclusion

Missions was born in the heart of God and should occupy a central place in the life of every believer and every local church. It is the heart of the church's life and the principal task of the church. Her expected response to missions has always been summarized as pray, give and go. In this sense, a church ceases to be a church when it loses its missionary vision. The level at which the kingdom of God has spread to places is a function of the effort and the commitment of the church.

The participation of the selected Baptist churches in missions within the period this research has covered is weak. It seems that many of the churches lack an understanding of the task of missions. Some probably think it is the affair of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The few who understand it seems to be taking it with levity. Deliberate efforts to teach missions, pray for missions and involve in practical outreach is weak. The ancient practice of dancing through the town to preach in strategic places has faded away without replacement with a contemporary strategy. The researcher also observed that many of the selected churches within the period covered did more of maintaining their membership through internal programmes. This is evident in the books of report consulted. The involvement of some of the churches

in the then Operation Reach All before 2000 AD was simply organization of internal revivals. Consequently, many people in the area are unevangelized and some who believed are spiritual babes. The churches do not deliberately create time to seek God's face for missions neither do they devote their effort to sending and supporting missions. As earlier stated some of the churches seem to see missions as organizing internal revival services, building magnificent buildings or simply contributing their 20% to the Nigerian Baptist Convention's co-operative programme. In the opinion of the researcher, internal revivals and other programmes are only to strengthen the church to carry out her primary task.

If the Great Commission will be accomplished in this generation, these churches must renew their commitment to the divine purpose, rededicate themselves to the redemptive task and intensify their efforts to fulfill the Great Commission. If these Baptist churches and all other local churches play their part in sending forth missionary armies to places they are led to by the Holy Spirit of God and give birth through deep intercessory prayer to mature indigenous churches, as the number of these churches increase in the next 10-15 years, in the next 30-40 years, all people groups would have been disciplined.

5.3 Recommendations

The missions participation of the selected Baptist churches and the contemporary Baptist churches can be improved upon. The researcher wishes to make the following recommendations to improve the churches participation in missions.

1. Pastors and church leaders must engage in missionary preaching and teachings – Pastors should preach and teach missions. The researcher believes that

Pastors and church leaders are catalysts to help mobilize the local church toward a more effective participation in missions. If the congregations are to increase participation in missions, they need continuous, accurate and effective teaching about missions. Thus, pastors must make commitments to preach on missions from the pulpit at least once in a month. It is in the teaching and preaching of missions that people are exposed to the imperative of missions participation. The more people know about what needs to be done and how it can be accomplished, the more they are likely to involve themselves in praying, giving and making themselves available for the service.

In 1792, William Carey preached what is perhaps the greatest and most important missionary message in the history of Western Christendom. At the Annual meeting of Nottingham Baptist Association he preached from Isaiah 54:2-3. The theme of the sermon was "Expect Great Things from God; Attempt Great Things for God". At the end of the message, he made an impassioned appeal for a resolution to form a missionary society (Vestal and Baker 92-93). This led to the formation of the English Baptist Missionary Society. Thus, the modern missions movement was born from the pulpit. The pulpit is to mobilize the pews for missions.

2. It is Important to have a monthly missions awareness day - Aside the commitment of pastors and leaders to preach and teach missions, the pastors/leaders in collaboration with the church should create a monthly mission awareness day. The essence of the mission awareness day is to share current information on missions. On the awareness day, the church may invite a missionary to share mission information, give mission report and present the

challenges and needs on the field. This will definitely stir the heart of some members of the congregation.

3. Mission Statement - Every local church, Baptist Associations, Conferences and Convention should have a well articulated mission statement.
4. The church should give missions tasks to the missionary organizations – The missionary organizations in a local Baptist church are usually the Men Missionary Union, Women Missionary Union, Youth and Baptist Student Fellowship. It is interesting to note that the four cardinal points of the missionary organizations especially the M.M.U and W.M.U fit into missions. The four cardinal points are to teach, to pray for missions, to contribute financially to missions and to physically participate in missions. The missions committee in collaboration with the pastor and the church council should give missions tasks annually to these organizations. The given mission tasks will be the vision of the organization for the year.
5. Every Local church should also develop a budget for missions annually - Budget presents a summary of the expected income and expenditure of an organization over a specific period of time usually a financial year. Every local church should develop a budget for missions. This is to include the missionaries the church intends to support, mission trips the church intends to embark upon, the outreaches, the mission conference and other mission related programmes the church envisions for the year. The researcher believes that the budget for missions should take more than fifty percent of the church's annual budget. This is because, the church exists for missions.
6. Every Church should have Missions and Outreach minister – Of recent there is a clamour for multi-staff ministry in the Nigeria Baptist Convention churches.

