

# Natural church development



## ESSAY TOPIC:

AN AUDIT OF THE OF A CONGREGATION DESIGN TO DISCERN ITS STRENGTH, WEAKNESS, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREAT.

STRATEGY FOR ITS FURTHER DEVELOPMENT BUILDING ON YOUR AUDIT

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, it has become very difficult to get people to church. Many would rather go to football field or a cinema than to church. Some complained that church is boring and out of date while others believe it is meant for the elderly and the children. Whichever way, there is a drift away in thinking. Burke echo the above observation said, " The reality is, postmodernism is a fad, it is not a new trend we can ride out and ignore. Whether or not you realise it, you live in a postmodern world . There is no point in pretending that you are not or wishing that things would go back to the way they were thirty years." [1] Wishing things in church go back decades' back is not good for people and civilization nevertheless it is unrealistic. However, Synder noted that, the church of God is God's kingdom or institution on earth and for that reason, the theological or organisation structure should not be questioned knowing well that from insertion of the church to now, the church is still unfolding God's purpose for humanity." [2] The church has a role of unfolding God's plan to the world yet faced with these challenges, what are the solutions to overcoming them. It is also worth noting that each church has her peculiarity. This essay will be focusing on using the Natural Church Development module to take a look at the health of a church I once worked with discern the strength and weakness

and strategizing a solution. This essay measures the church's health rather than the typical growth by using the Schwarz's eight quality of characteristics of church health.

## THE CHURCH HISTORY AND HEALTH

Coming from an African church setting, I felt compelled to pick on one of the African church setting I have been involved for years for this essay due to my insight of the congregation and the history. I felt assured to proceed using the church because the pastors and the governing boards were willing to assist in the research that might be involved. Furthermore, the governing board and the pastors were open to the administration of the Natural Church Development using the eight quality characteristics to assess the church health. The NCD experimental mode was used throughout the collation and administration of the project. The main instrument of the NCD used was the questionnaire, due to short time in getting data needed to write this essay. The questionnaire used for this essay was limited to only very few members of the congregation of twenty who were pick randomly in order to have a balance information. The expectation is that at the end of the project, the church would have been healthier and experience growth. Also, putting to mind the stresses this change might bring to the congregation, the governing board and pastors are helping the congregation negotiate the change while the project last. This estimated time of completion is one year.

The church setting has her origin from Nigeria, West Africa with over 65 years of existence. The central core message of the church as well as the organisational principle is based on the book of Hebrew 13: 8 with Berner

noting that, "... has almost gone full circle through the vicissitudes of " days of small things" to periods of intense evangelistic fervour and search for doctrinal anchor and purity, to the present explosion into socio-political power, economic privilege and spiritual aristocracy." [3] Nigeria in West Africa has diverse religion and beliefs with three main religion mainly the African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. This diversity brings with along hunger for the truth. Moreover, the quest to fight poverty also aided the growth for search for divine intervention which many found in the churches. This is possible because of the reliance on Holy Spirit among the Pentecostal churches. Furthermore, the young and educated wanted something different from the traditional religion or the orthodox churches settled for this new moment. The growth of Pentecostalism began to make most churches to focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit and the power of Pentecost so much that church leadership and organisation in most of these churches have to be by the leading of the Holy Spirit. The selected church organisation of this essay was one of the early church of this moment.

The growth of the church movement led to the expansion of the church beyond the border of Africa to other countries including United Kingdom where the parish of the church for this essay is located. The location of this parish was strategic because it is in an area of London that was seriously in need of a change and a living church. As most churches in that area then were either empty and the buildings were converted to hall for general social activities or you see only elderly weekly. This calls for the need of a church for the people not only to worship God but also socialise together creating a community in a community. As noted by Avis, " Mission is not a discrete

activity of the church, but the cutting edge of the church's life. It includes the vital areas of social engagement, compassionate care, prophetic critique, Christian education and intellectual dialogue and apologetic."[4]

The challenge I discovered was that the church was not reaching the people of the community and the few people coming were people of the same culture. Research carried out in the community during my earlier years in the church shows that there were people searching for a church nearby but were not feeling welcomed to be a part of the church due to approach, cultural design or the mode of service and people management. The pastors and governing board noticed these challenges but were limited with lasting solution to these challenges. Moreover, they are of the opinion that it is God that gives the increase 1 Cor 3: 6. Secondly, there were sense of satisfaction and success because there were flints of cars always packing for church services. It is sad because though there were flints of cars in major services, the people coming were from other communities, the church was unable to reach her immediate community. Furthermore, some the members who were from Africa now residing in this area were not getting the spiritual satisfaction there were hoping for because of their experiences from the African setting of the church.

The theological implication of the struggle was that many who were very spiritually thorough back in Africa were now struggling with their faith either due to cultural, economic or social differences that need to be attended to in order to create a balance among the congregation. Many not only left the church to seek for spiritual satisfaction while some left Christianity completely due to disappointment in the leadership style or approach.

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Looking this, Snyder stated that, " the church is the agent of the Kingdom of God first of all through what it. It best serves the kingdom's interests as the messianic community of God's people rather than as an ecclesiastical institution."[5]

For clarity of purpose I concentrated my project on the principle of the church, that states " but God that gave the increase"[6]Though, there are numerous books, theories and modules on the concept of church health today. For me to remain focus on my objective, and fundamental principle of the parish, I restricted myself to the Natural Church Development by Christian A. Schwarz. In this essay, the concept given by Christian A. Schwarz and the eight quality characteristics will be used to analyse the church health and how to experience growth.

#### NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The leadership of the church believes that it is only God who gives the increase in ministry or church. This ideology echoes Schwarz's NCD. However, NCD gives a more details and analytical ways of getting result. Schwarz believes that church is like a plant and should experience natural growth progressions.[7]Which is based on biblical principles growth citing Mark 4: 26-29.[8]He sees the church as a biotic plant that has the potential of reproducing itself if there is the right condition for growth which include reducing the " environmental resistance"[9]to the minimum.[10]As noted by the leadership of the church that it is God that gives the increase, Schwarz believes that Church growth can happen " all-by-itself"[11]In as much as God is the one that causes the growth Schwarz pointed out that there must be

self-organisation for proper growth to occur.[12] Since plant grows by itself once the conditions of growth are met, then the church can also naturally grow as God is the one that gives the conditions of growth in the first place. [13] He noted that for biotic potential to be released for self-organisation of a church there must be quality characteristic, minimum strategy, biotic principles and paradigm shift.[14] Hence, he Defines Natural church development as " Releasing the growth automatism, by which God himself grows his church." [15]

While mentioning the sources of his discoveries which include research, observation of nature and biblical studies of natural growing processes of plants Schwarz made it clear that observation of the natural study of plant or church should not be the standard of accessing the growth but the scripture and what is theological acceptable.[16] He distinguished NCD from other concepts of church growth development because it is " principle-oriented" [17], " quality services" [18] and the release of " natural growth focus" [19] with which the church is built by God. [20]

Schwarz gave his qualities of characteristics for effective self-organisation as follows:

- Empowering Leadership which involves teaching and making leader from the lay members of the church
- Gift-oriented lay ministry. By this, members are helped to discover and identify God's gift and are developed.
- Passionate Spirituality which include the role of spiritual exercises in church

- Functional structures like heads of department and unit leaders.
- Inspiring worship service.
- Holistic small groups
- Need-oriented evangelism
- Loving relationship.

Selection Christian Schwarz's NCD to assess my church health because of his discovery which agrees with the teaching and the ideology of the leadership of the church, one cannot overlook some of the lingering questions in the approach applied by Schwarz. He carried out researches all over the world collating data to prove the viability of NCD but there were little said on the word of God regarding the concept except for the initially scripture. For any concept on God's church to be effective, attention must be given to the word of God above technology and research. Though technology and research enhances good result.[21] Similarly, he seems to distance himself from size and numbers and make quality of service seem to be all that is needed even if there is not numerical growth.[22]

#### APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT

God's plan of reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ using the church is important Col. 1: 17-20 and "the mission of the church is to demonstrate this headship"[23] but if the church is not measuring up then the devil and the world have the upper hand as seen today. Schwarz stated that for any church to experience good health growth, the characteristics must interplay and a weakness in one of the characteristics can limit the effectiveness of the others.[24]



Analysis and review of questionnaires were carried out with the pastors and the governing board of the church. During the review, it was discovered that though the church was not lacking in all the quality characteristics but as mentioned above lacking in one can limit the others. There were area that needed to be strengthen.

Schwarz pointed out that the level of contentment in a congregation can be traced to the level of involvement people have in the congregation. People who are involved in their churches using the gifts and depending on the Holy Spirit, have a higher contentment than those who do not.[25]The church empowerment of leadership was good as there were structures to teach members on getting involved. Members are trained in-house and are made to serve in any department of the choosing. Furthermore, during this training gift are discovered, identified and are used for the church, this promotes confidence, peace and desire to want to serve God with the gift.[26]

Holistic small group called house cell where members are divided according to the location and a central place is pick for the meeting of the group. This foster good relationship among the members. Schwarz said that, " seek to apply the Bible in a relevant way characterise healthy church".[27]However, there were situation where members are too familiar that relocating them for other assignment became an issue. One of the strategy to solving that was rotational of the leadership of the small group.

Passionate spirituality was one of the major problem because of the doctrinal beliefs of the church (Africa origin of the church). Some of the members were unhappy with too strict laws on dressing, where you cannot put on a

particular kind of dressing once you are a member of the working unit in the church. Looking at the questionnaire, the issue of dressing stood out for attention. The pastors and the governing board had to biblically look for a balance that will be attracted to encourage people been free. Some were not in agreement with the leadership as this was changing the doctrine of the church. However, the understanding of the people as regard passionate spirituality were difference from what Schwarz's. Schwarz believe that Passionately spiritual Christians are enthusiastic about their faith. Passionately spiritual people are growing in their faith and holiness regardless of dressing or any doctrine that might be in place.[28]Schwarz's thought was carefully planned to one of the services and there were significant progress.

Healthy churches are not overworked by activities that take it turns on both the members and the leadership instead it allows for room it allows for programs that help the leaders to reproduce themselves.[29]For a church that believes in making members active by putting up many church activities, helping the leadership understood the negative impact was very important and how to shift away from such practices to a practice of reproducing quality believers.

Inspiring Worship services involves giving God honour, recognising his sovereignty through the sacraments, the Word of God, preaching, testimony and fellowship through the power of the Holy Spirit.[30]Worship is a priority and it is to be taken so. Therefore, for a healthy church, quality time must be spent in prayers and planning of any services or programme to bring people to the presence of God.

Need-oriented evangelism is needed for the church as evangelism is the duty of all believers. While Jesus was ascending to the sky is said " Go ye to all the nations" Matt 28: 19. New strategy of evangelism was introduced to encourage members to meet the need of both Christian and non-Christian. One of such was the introduction of a food bank to assist as many in the community in need of food and though this many came to the saving knowledge of the Lord.

John the Apostle wrote, " Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God" 1 John 4: 7. Snyder writes, " Christians are kingdom people when, having found peace with God through Jesus, they build a peaceful community and become agents of God's peace in the world"[31]The people were encouraged not to show love to other believers only but to the unbelievers alike so that by our love, they can come to the knowledge of God's grace and measure.

The pastors and the governing board realise areas of improvement, took it on board and began to implement the change in order to have a healthier church that can serve the community and shows God's kingdom on earth.

## CONCLUSION

Schwarz believe that, healthy or whole churches are those that are strong in all eight specified areas[32]and one quality cannot lead to growth in churches but rather involving the interplay of all eight characters. His words, " the key is found in the harmonious interplay of all eight elements."[33]Therefore, it is important to improve the services giving in the

church to same standard or more compare to what is offered in the world by so doing making the Church become more attractive to the world.

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[6]1 Cor 3: 6 KJV Bible

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