

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Factors Influencing Sustainability of Church Growth in Pentecostal Churches: The Case of Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya

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Abstract:

The purpose of this quantitative research was to investigate factors influencing the sustainability of church growth in Pentecostal Churches: The case of Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya. In the Great Commission recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus left no doubts in the minds of His Apostles that He expected His church to grow both numerically and geographically. Although several attempts have been made regarding studies that touch on factors that are key in influencing the sustainability of projects, study lacks that could deal with the issue of church growth sustainability in Pentecostal churches. Yet the desire of almost every church leader is to identify key "drivers" for church growth. Further, to identify factors that are key in influencing the sustainability of the same church growth. The gap identified necessitated the need for this study.

The method of research that was used in this study is quantitative research. The purpose of quantitative research is to quantify a research problem, to measure and count issues, and then to generalize these findings to a broader population (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). Sampling procedure was simple random sampling and the target population for the study was 250 persons (comprising of church leaders and church members). The sample was 10% according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). There was no bias concerning leadership position. Data collection instrument was questionnaires which were given out to respondents for the purpose of statistical representation of the researcher's findings in the study. The research objectives were to identify the influence of church ministry, members' empowerment, pastor's factor, members' welfare and worship service on church growth. The choice of Christian Church International, Mutitu in Murang'a was informed by the fact that the church has been growing and pioneering other branches. Currently the church membership stands at 250 and the church has pioneered seven (branches churches). Quantitative data was coded and analyzed using statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study showed church ministry, members' empowerment, pastor's factor, members' welfare/needs and worship service played big role in the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu. In terms of rating, worship service was the highest. That meant that church members would be happy and willing to attend a church service where songs sung are understood.

Keywords: Church, factors, growth, influence, Pentecostal, sustainability

1. Introduction and Background

This chapter provides a background overview of the church growth globally and links church growth to church leadership. It reports different research works that have shown that Pentecostal churches in Kenya are growing both geographically and numerically. The chapter introduces the concepts of Pentecostalism, Church Growth and explores factors that influence church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Murang'a County, Kenya. The chapter then discusses the problem and states the objectives of the study, as well as research questions. Justification of the study, its scope, limitations as well as delimitation are provided.

The best way to describe the church is to consider her as a community of all true believers for all time. That means that the church comprises of genuinely saved people (Grudem, 1994). The head of this church is Christ who can also be described as her source of existence (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15, 15; Col. 1:18). There are metaphorical terms used in the bible to describe the church: bride of Christ (Eph. 5: 32; 2 Cor. 11:2), family (1Tim. 5: 1,2; 2Cor.6:18; Matt. 12:49-50; 1 John 3: 14-18), a building (1 Cor. 3:9), the body of Christ (1 Cor.12: 12-27). Not only is Christ the head of the church, but the force behind her stability also (Mathew 16:18).

Referring to the growth of the church, Luke in Acts 2:47 observes that the growth of the early church did not come because of human effort, but by Christ's own power. The first century Christians took the Great commission seriously (Mark 16:20). The Book of Acts and the Epistles show striking results that followed as a result of their faithfulness to Christ (Lica, 2017). As the author posits, that churches were planted in all the great cities of Asia Minor and Macedonia. He postulates that the spiritual factors of the rapid growth of the church in the book of Acts were the five purposes of the church from Acts 2: Worship, teaching, discipleship, ministry, evangelism and mission. He however notes that at the top of these factors was the Holy Spirit, who helped the church to grow in spite of persecution and hard times.

As it is well captured in the Book of Acts, the commission was to minister to scattered Israel and to spread the gospel throughout the known Empire and beyond (Ludlow, 2009). Ludlow posits that the expansion of the early church was not without its difficulties. According to Ludlow, there was growth despite the presence of long, dangerous, travels, persecutions, issues of Church policy, incorporation of foreigners and taking care of distant congregations.

Christian Church International (C.C. I.) is one of the churches that were born out of the great revival that swept East Africa in 1970s. The church has pioneered branches in many parts of Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan and currently one church in United States of America. In Kenya the church has several Dioceses, Regions and Sub regions, with about four hundred churches. Although Christian Church International has witnessed substantial numerical growth reported in different dioceses, there has been a big concern over a big number of churches that are either declining or plateauing. However, there are some churches that are growing. The question of "what are the most important factors influencing church growth?" has consistently been raised, necessitating a research that would answer the question.

Christian Church International, Mutitu is a branch which administratively falls under Kandara Sub-region, Kenol region in Diocese of Murang'a. The branch was launched in the year 1995 by the author of this paper. Since then the branch has pioneered six other branches. And, although every time a new branch has been launched, the mother church releases a number of members to join the new branches, that has not in any way affected the mother church in regard to numerical growth. Currently the church has a population over 200 members. Besides, the church has good infrastructures; including a good permanent building. The church has also assisted the branches in the purchase of properties.

1.1. Statement of Problem

One of the major challenges that many churches grapple with, is inability to identify important factors, which could play major role in not only, influencing the growth, but importantly, sustaining the same. Due to that fact, many church leaders, and especially pastors, are getting frustrated, as they keep applying guesswork in this issue sustaining church growth.

1.2. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to establish factors influencing the sustainability of church growth in Pentecostal churches: The case of Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya.

1.3. Research Objectives

- To evaluate the influence of church ministry on the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya.
- To identify the influence of church members' empowerment on the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya.
- To ascertain the influence of pastor on the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya.
- To assess the influence of members' welfare on the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya.
- To analyze the influence of worship service on the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya?

1.4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent does church ministry influence the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya?
- In what way does church members' empowerment influence the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya?
- To what degree does a pastor influence the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya?
- To what extent does church members' welfare, influence the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya?
- In what way does worship service influence the sustainability of church growth in Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant not only to Christian Church International, leadership, but also to other Christian Churches, in that, the leadership will use the findings and recommendations to help other churches that may be frustrated, because they may not be understanding what to do to stir growth and also to sustain the same.

2. Literature Review

God had an eternal purpose when he called the church. There are three main purposes for church's existence: to worship, edify, (nurture) and evangelism. The first priority for the church is to worship God. As he wrote to the church at Colossae, Paul tells them, "sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16).

The church of Jesus Christ is "to live for the praise of His glory" (Eph.1:12). Worship to God, and nothing else is the main purpose for the church's being. Secondly, the church exists to edify and nurture believers so that they become mature in the faith. The Apostle Paul's main aim was to make sure that he presented every man mature in Christ (Col.1:28). He repeated the same as he wrote to the Ephesians (Eph.4:12-13). Lastly, the church exists to reach out (Evangelize) to the lost (unbelievers) in the Great Commission, Jesus commanded His disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt.28:19). Evangelism can thus be said to be the church's primary call to the world. As observed by McGavran (1990) evangelism and church growth is an essential part of the Christian faith, which should not be sacrificed at the altar of other activities. Unfortunately, many Christians have not awoken to that fact as evidenced in their prayerlessness. Many take this issue of church lightly or for growth. The assumption is that church growth is an automatic thing. Such an altitude of complacency is to blame for lack of growth of many churches. It is the same altitude that has many made the many would be big churches into static congregations. Believers need to be reminded that God's major concern is to have the lost found and brought into a close relationship with Jesus Christ.

God is more pleased when sinners are brought into a relationship with Him. That informs the reason for evangelism. Jesus Christ, the Master of evangelism came to seek and save the lost. He is the founder and the head of the church who gave His followers a command, which is referred to as the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 19, 20). That meant that Evangelism should take precedence over other activities especially social activities. The Christians responsibility is to go out as Christ's ambassadors (Eph. 6:20), witnesses (Acts 1:8) and messengers (Rev.14:16:16 -12) in order to bring into His kingdom those lost in sin (unbelievers). That is the reason why the issue of the church growth should concern every believer.

It has been observed that one of the main reasons why churches grow anywhere is because there are believers who have chosen to become a flaming Christians, through entering into an obedient relationship with Jesus Christ (McGavran, 1965). That is to say, that Church growth is as a result to obedience and faithfulness to God. Faithfulness, in this case is in the sense of carrying out the mandate of preaching the Good News of the Kingdom. Christians are to emulate their master whose main concern is to seek and save the lost. The Christians preoccupation should be evangelization. Where there is no faithfulness in proclaiming Christ to the lost, there may be no church growth. That calls upon believers to leave their comfort zones, and become totally committed to a life of compassion to the lost. The compassion pushes the believers to go out in order to bring back those who have no place for God or those who have strayed away or drifted back from the faith. Once Christians find them, they venture into the ministry of feeding the flock, which eventually translates into church growth. On the other side, the moment Christians become apathetic and allow those who may have given their lives to Christ to drift back into the world, churches will not grow but will decline and fail to grow.

The heart of God thinks about church growth. McGavran (1965) says Church expansion does not begin with better methods or more money. His view is that Church growth is a continuation of redemption, in the heart of God from eternity, revealed in His Son. He further argues that this ministry was imparted by Christ to His disciples, energized by the Holy Spirit, and has been given to Christians today as both gift and command. As Wario (2008) observes, the growth of a church is a natural outcome of her life and existence. He posits that as long as the Church is on this earth with this mandate and lives for the fulfillment of her calling, her growth is real. On the other hand, when the Church forgets her calling and the mandate she is given; her growth can hardly be seen.

One of the factors that contributed to the growth of the early church was recognition of people needs. Followers' welfare was not ignored (Acts 6:1). The authors posit that each member of the community was concerned about the welfare of the other. They argue that it was this that people around them saw and called them Christians. That has made the authors to conclude that the church will expand if Christians will be able to provide basic amenities for the society through caring for the physical needs of both followers and non-followers, so as to be able to gain access to their spiritual need.

Another factor that plays critical role in church growth is pastor or the leader. No one can ignore that a pastor as a leader has dynamic impact on church growth. Lee and Chuang (2009) argue that a good leader not only inspires followers' potential to enhance effectiveness, but is also keen on meeting their requirements in the process of achieving the organization's set goals. That seems to suggest that church growth can be improved if those in leadership will be strategic in designing churches' programs in such a way as to meet the needs of the target group (Nikkel, 1991).

Christians should find solace in the fact that although, the world is becoming increasingly more complex, secular-minded and technologically advanced, many of the evangelistic principles that worked for the early church in Acts are normative for our churches today (Rainer, 1990). Thus, as the Rainer argue, churches that do not grow should not look elsewhere, but rather should blame their failure on their inability to practice these basic principles. In relations to evangelism everywhere, it is so unfortunate to learn that many Christians have neglected their roles and obligation to the world. What can be seen among many Christians today is unabated preoccupation with selfish activities and projects at the expense of the gospel.

There can never be true church growth without new disciples being added, and there being a responsive church membership (Rainer, 1993). In this discussion of church growth, the question that many may ask, is whether we are talking about Spiritual (Qualitative) or numerical (Quantitative). It is the author's argument that the two are inseparable. In terms of precedence, Martin's (1995) says spiritual growth precedes and goes together with numerical growth. But any concerned and reasonable Christian understands that numerical church growth is absolutely necessary (Worancha, 2012).

Writing about the qualities of a growing church, Worancha (2012) lists: a climate of happiness and loving God and one another, Bible-centered atmosphere, enthusiasm, evangelistic zeal, ability to claim backslidden members, spread faith, to practice its vision, prayerful, believing in the Holy Scripture, and practicing what it say (Mt 7:21, Lk. 6:46; 11:25; Rom 2:13; 1John 3:7; James 1:22). Rainer (1993) postulates that for any church growth pastors are responsible in setting the bar. Rainer's argument is that church members usually take the vision, priorities, and values of their pastor. That is to say is the pastor enjoys high trust and respect from the members, services will attract many worshipers. Besides the role played by the lead pastor in church growth, Rainer argues that church atmosphere should be exciting, friendly, and positive. After thorough study of church growth, McGavran, (1990) summarized a few common causes out of the thousands that worked for and against church growth. Concerning reasons associated with church growth, McGavran observed that a Christian leader devised a broad pattern of action, which multiplied congregations. Second, there was particular plan for multiplying churches, which fitted his special population. According to McGavran Christian leader prayed to God a lot for men, women to be born again, and churches to be multiplied.

Concerning reasons associated with lack of Church growth McGavran (1965) observed that in those churches leaders were too busy or preoccupied with existent maintenance work. Secondly, church and mission were devoted to an only slightly productive pattern instead of a highly productive one. Third, church and mission allowed themselves to remain stuck in an area of low potential. Fourth, missionaries did not learn the language of the people, instead worked always in English, and so established the image that the Christian religion signifies mainly cultural advance.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology typically refers to the approach or paradigm that underpins the research (Blaxter et al. 2006). Fundamentally, there are two methods used by researchers depending on the area of one's study: Quantitative and Qualitative research methods. The purpose of quantitative research is to quantify a research problem, to measure and count issues, and then to generalize these findings to a broader population (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2010). In undertaking any research, the goal of a researcher is to discover or establish solutions to questions through the application of right and systematic procedures. Wario (2008) posits that the end result of the research work is anchored on the researcher's questions. Further, in the process of finding answers for the questions, the researcher has to follow or apply systematic procedure. The issue of digging with the view of trying to understand the reasons as to why some churches are registering substantial growth, while some others are declining or dying" elicits some elicits stimulating debate.

3.1. Type of Research

The type of research that was used in this study is quantitative research. The purpose of quantitative research is to quantify a research problem, to measure and count issues, and then to generalize these findings to a broader population (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). Questionnaires were given out to respondents for the purpose of statistical representation of the researcher's findings in the study.

3.2. Sampling Method

The research sampling method that was used in this study is random sampling in order to obtain a more scientific result which could fit the bill of being correct representative of the entire population.

3.3. Respondents

The respondents in this study came from members of the church who hailed from different localities (villages). The randomly sampled respondents were asked for consent to fill (answer) the questionnaire

4. Summary of Findings

The data collected from the field was organized, summarized and analyzed. The results are hence given here.

General information

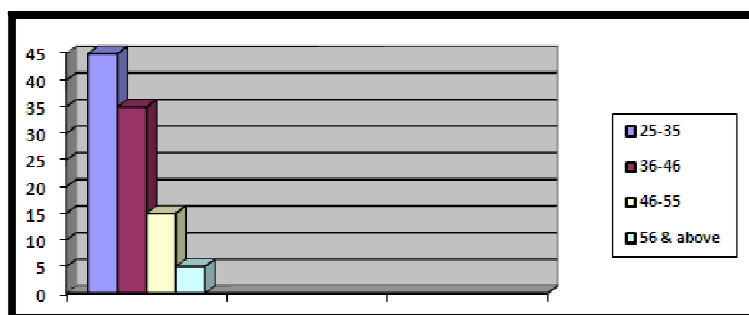


Figure 1: Age

In terms of age, those within 25-35yrs were 45%, 36-45yrs were 35%, 46-55yrs were 15% while 56 yrs. and above were 5%.

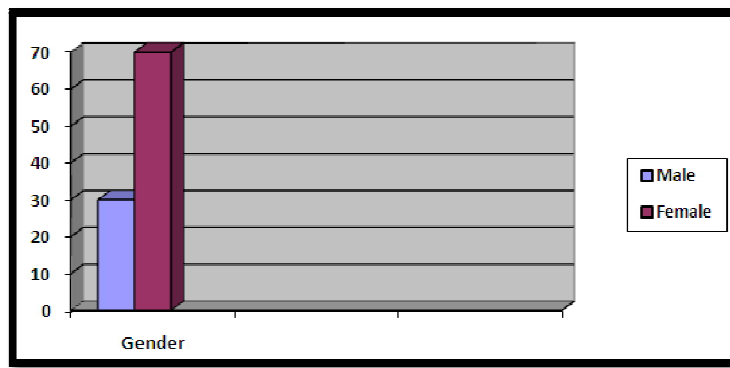


Figure 2: Gender

In case of gender, 70% of the respondents were female, while 30% were male.

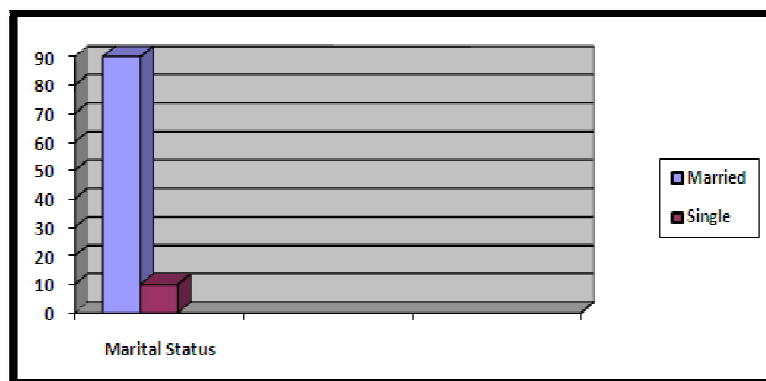


Figure 3: Marital Status

Majority of the respondents (90%) were married, with the unmarried (single) totaling 10%.

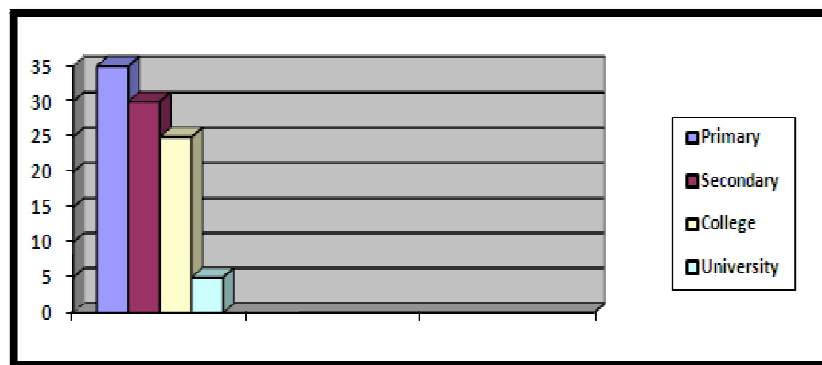


Figure 4: Education

In case of education, 35% of the respondents had attained primary level, 30% secondary, 25% college, while university level was 5%

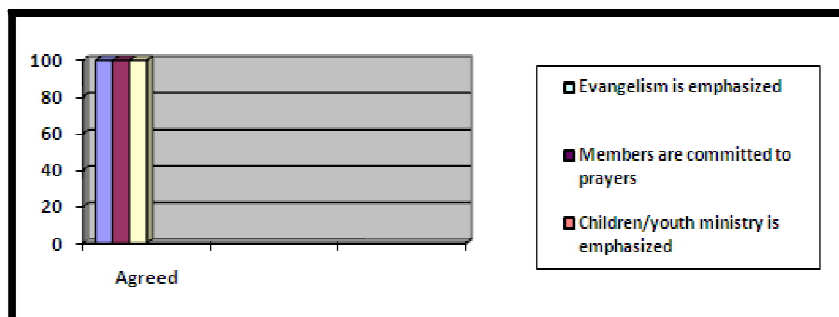


Figure 5: Church Ministry

All the respondents (100%) strongly felt that the church emphasized evangelism, members were committed to prayers and that Children/Youth ministries were emphasized.

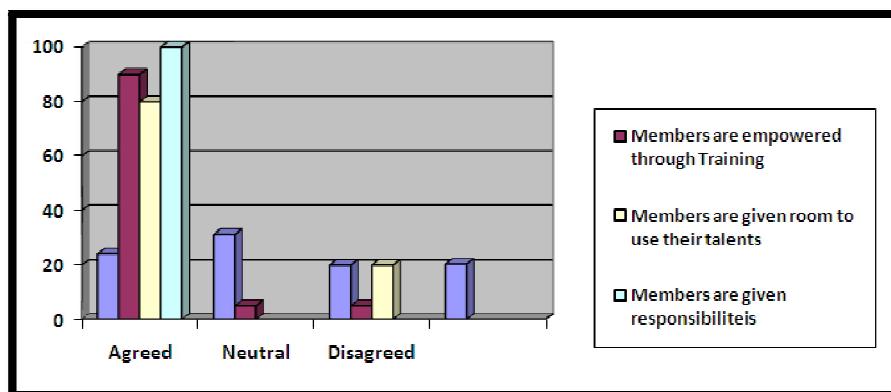


Figure 6: Members' Empowerment

Majority (90%) of the respondents strongly felt that members were empowered through training, 5% were neutral, while 5% disagreed. 80% of the respondents agreed that members were given room to use their talents, while 20% disagreed. However, all of them (100%) strongly felt that members were given responsibilities.

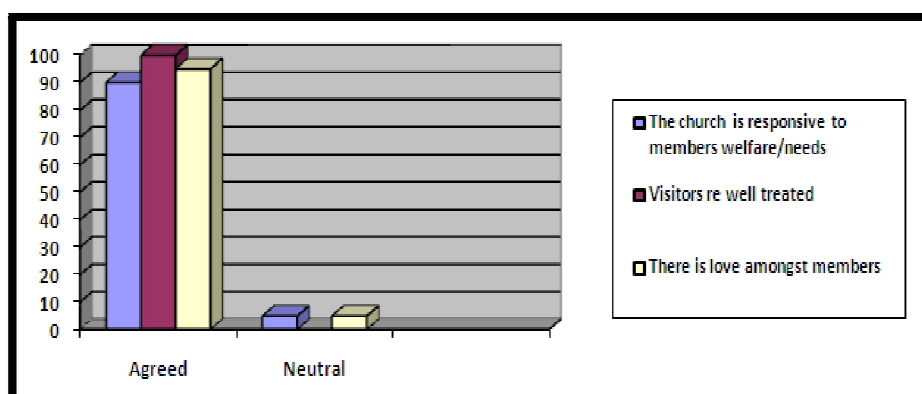


Figure 7: Members' Welfare/Needs

100% of the respondents were in agreement that the church was responsive to members' welfare/needs and that visitors were well treated. Majority (95%) of them felt there was love amongst members, with 5% remaining neutral.

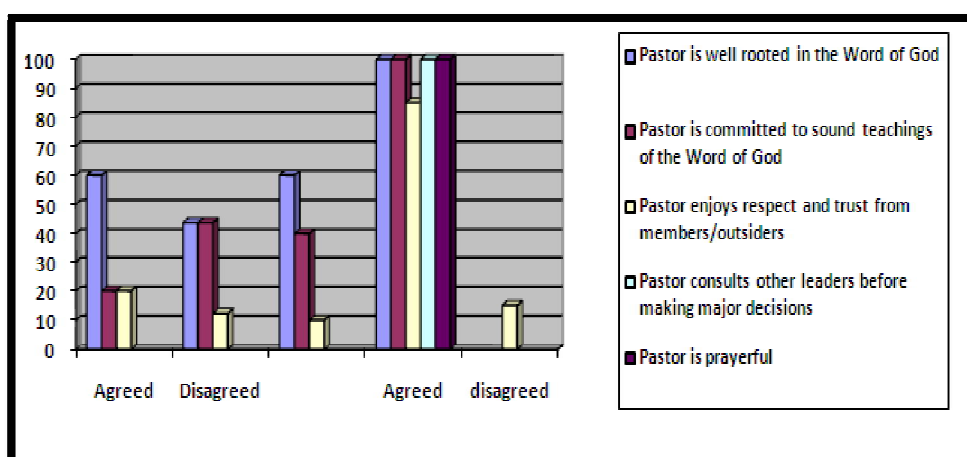


Figure 8: Pastor's Factor

100% of the respondents felt that the Pastor was well rooted in the word of God, committed to its sound teachings, prayerful and consulted other leaders before he made major decisions. In regard to the Pastor's public image, majority (85%) of the respondents strongly felt that he enjoyed respect and trust from members/outside, while 15% disagreed. In respect to consultation.

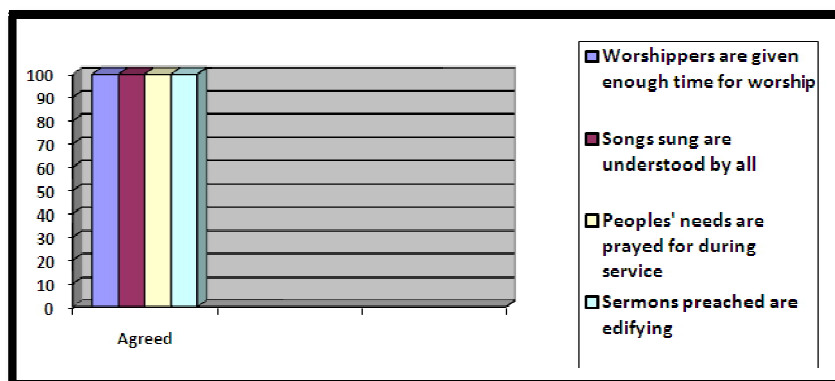


Figure 9: Worship Service

100% of the respondents strongly felt that worshippers were given enough time for worship, songs sung were understood by most people, people's needs were prayed for during worship service and that sermons preached were edifying.

5. Discussion of the Results

The major variables to test in this study were church ministry, members' empowerment, pastor's role, members' welfare/needs and worship service. The study attempted to ascertain whether there was any relationship between the above variables and church growth. There were several questions developed from each variable. In terms of rating, worship service was the highest. 100% of the respondents strongly felt that worshippers were given enough time for worship, songs sung were understood by most people, people's needs were prayed for during worship service and that sermons preached were edifying. All the respondents (100%) strongly felt that the church emphasized evangelism, members were committed to prayers and that Children/Youth ministries were emphasized. Members' welfare came third. 100% of the respondents were in agreement that the church was responsive to members' welfare/needs and that visitors were well treated. Majority (95%) of them felt there was love amongst members, with 5% remaining neutral. Fourth was pastor's factor. Majority of the respondents felt he was well rooted in the word of God, committed to its sound teachings, prayerful and consulted other leaders before he made major decisions. Majority of them (85%) said he enjoyed respect and trust from members/outside. Lastly was empowerment. Majority (90%) of the respondents strongly felt that members were empowered through training. 80% of them felt there was room to use their talents. All of them strongly felt that members were given responsibilities.

The results seemed quite telling in regard to the relationship between the variables and church growth. The manner in which the worship service is conducted seems to influence church growth. In this case it seemed to inform why church attendance was high. Church ministry seemed to influence church growth. That touched on evangelism, prayer and youth/children ministries. The emphasis on these ministries to some extent seemed to inform the reason why the church grows. Wagna (1970) says the church spreads and increases in an environment and atmosphere where Christians constrained by love obediently move out, telling everyone the good news of the Jesus Christ. There seemed to be a relationship also between the leader (pastor) and church growth. When the pastor is rooted in the Word of God, teaches it soundly, prays and is humble enough to consult other leaders, chances of building trust will be high. Rainer (2007) after evaluating nineteen churches observed four qualities found in every successful growing church: Pastors set the bar. The response to members' welfare/needs was also rated as being critical in influencing growth. As noted earlier in this paper one of the factors that contributed to the growth of the church in Antioch was recognition of people needs (Eneglo & Enwefah, 2004). Empowering others through training and giving them responsibilities increases more workers.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study showed that in order for a church to sustain church growth factors such as church ministry, members' empowerment, pastor's factor, members' welfare/needs and worship service should be emphasized. It seems members (people) will be happy and willing to attend a church service where songs sung are understood, members' needs are prayed for, visitors well treated, and where love among members prevails. It seems members will be comfortable with a pastor who understands and preaches sound gospel, respected in the community and committed to prayer. It seems also that empowering other people plays critical role in church growth; in that more workers are developed. In that regard, it is important for a church to consider seriously those factors that contribute toward church growth. Christian Church International, Mutitu will need to build on their successes and improve on those areas where scores were relatively lower. It should be noted however that there might have been some other factors that may have played role in influencing the results, hence need for a repeat, but with different respondents. Secondly, applying the findings to a different setting may help ascertain the reliability of the same. That is to say, there is need to conducting the same study within several different churches. Lastly, it may be advisable to share the finding of this research with churches that may be praying for church growth. Perhaps they may need to consider the factors identified.

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

The questionnaire is designed to collect data on a study titled: Factors Influencing Sustainability of Church Growth in Pentecostal Churches: The Case of Christian Church International, Mutitu, Kenya. Kindly respond to the following questions honestly and frankly. Your participation will be treated with confidentiality and anonymous. The information given will only be used for study purpose.

Part 1: General Information

Kindly put a tick in the appropriate box

1. Age 25-35 36-45 46-55 56- above
2. Gender Male Female
3. Marital Status Single Married
4. Education Primary Secondary College University

Part 2: Questions

Please read the following statements and circle the number that best applies to you: Strongly Agree (SA) =1, Agree (A) = 2, Neutral (N) = 3, Disagree (D) = 4, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 5

SA A N D SD

Church Ministry

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Evangelism is emphasized | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Members are committed to prayers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Children/youth ministry is emphasized | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Members' Empowerment

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Members are empowered through training | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Members are given room to use their talents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Members are given responsibilities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Members' welfare

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. The church is responsive to members' welfare/needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Visitors are well treated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. There is love amongst members | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Pastor's Factor

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Pastor is well rooted in the Word of God | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Pastor is committed to sound teachings of the Word of God | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Pastor enjoys respect and trust from members/outside | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Pastor consults other leaders before making major decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Pastor is prayerful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Worship Service

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. Worshipers are given enough time for worship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Songs sung are understood by all | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Peoples' needs are prayed for during service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Sermons preached are edifying | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thanks for participating in the Survey