

CHURCH PLANTING AND GROWTH:RESOURCES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

by

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the resources, challenges and prospects of planting and growing a Church with particular reference to the African context. Among other things, the paper argues that church planting (CP) and church growth (CG) are processes which require certain basic resources for fruition. In other words, the planting of a Church and its consequential growth do not just happen automatically; certain resources must be engaged for required results. In these processes, certain challenges are bound to surface. However, armed with the dynamics of the resources for planting and growth, the Church planter can overcome such challenges and maximise the prospects.

The concepts of 'planting' and 'growing' are biological and apply primarily to plants. As living organisms, plants are expected to grow when nurtured. The Church, which is a living 'spiritual organism' made up of believers in Christ, is expected to grow. It is not enough to plant a Church; it must be viable (capable of surviving), healthy and growing. To realise this end, certain dynamics of resources must be put in place.

Four research questions are pertinent in this paper. First, what are the major resources for church planting and growth? Second, what are the main challenges confronting Church planting and growth in Nigeria (Africa)? Third, what are the prospects of church planting and growth? And fourth, what are the practical tips in planting and growing an indigenous church in the African context? Each of these questions is dealt with in each of the sections of the paper.

Resources for Church Planting and Growth

Before identifying the major resources for Church planting and growth, it is important to recall the basic meanings of the terminologies under consideration. Church planting is a process of bringing men and women to faith in Christ and is obvious from this definition that Church planting is not really about physical

structures; rather, it is the believers in Christ who are constituted together as the .body of Christ who meet together for worship. Arguably, the most productive method of doing Christian missions is Church Planting.

On the other hand, Peter Wagner informs that "Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function and health of Christian Churches as they relate to the effective implementation of God's commission to make disciples of all nations."² This definition by Wagner sees Church growth as the expansion of existing churches as they seek to obey Christ's command in Matthew 28:18-20. One of such ways a Church depicts growth is to multiply itself through planting other congregations of believers in Christ. Matthews Ojo in his article, "Priesthood of all Believers in the context of Church Growth Agenda among Nigerian Baptists," informs that "Church growth emphasises the New Testament concept of extending the Church and the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel and the demonstration of qualitative Christian life."³ Again, in Ojo's understanding of Church growth, the key phrase is "extending the church through evangelism." Thus the two key words used by Wagner and Ojo; 'expansion' and 'extending' both simply connote increase. Therefore, Church growth is simply an increase in all the areas and functions in the life of the Church.

Resources for Church Planting

In the task of Church Planting, there are certain resources without which the Church cannot be planted. Some scholars in the study of church planting describe these resources as "Essentials of church planting." To ignore, reject or discard any of these, is to plan to fail in the task. Charles Brock in his book, *Indigenous Church Planting*, identified four major resources which are essential for the task of Church planting. The four resources or essentials according to Brock are the Spirit, the Seed, the Sower and the Soil.' We shall briefly examine each of these.

The first resource without which the process cannot occur is "the Spirit." It is obvious that from beginning to the end, the source of wisdom and strength for the activities of the early church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles was the indwelling Holy Spirit. In Acts 13:1-3, it was the Spirit that categorically instructed that Paul and Barnabas be separated for the task of missions. This mission work was done primarily through church planting. In church planting, the Spirit can give inspiration and direction for the task, as well as empowerment for the task. Therefore, the first resource which the would-be church planter must rely on is the Holy Spirit.

The second resource for church planting is "the Seed." This refers to the eternal living and potent word of God, the Bible. It is important for the church planter to note that all the preaching of the early church leading to church planting by the Apostles was basically hinged on the word of God. The Church planter has only one authoritative book, which is the Bible. In church planting, the Bible is simply like the road map for a tourist and like a compass to the pilot. The Bible provides the message for the preaching which can transform lives, leading to a commitment of faith and the birth of new congregations of believers in Christ. To attempt to establish a Church on human fables and philosophy is to make a ship wreck of the process.

Third is "the sower" or the church planter. It is interesting to note that God has chosen to accomplish the task of missions to the world through human instrumentality. It has pleased God to use finite men and women to be His instruments to plant churches. Every established church has the God-given task of planting other churches. The sower could be churches, parachurch groups or individual Christians as God gives the grace. Indeed, how can the church be planted if there is no sower? Just like the other resources, the sower is indispensable in the task of Church planting.

The fourth resource is "the Soil." This simply refers to the people. In none of Jesus' parables, He identified three kinds of human hearts (the soil) in the matters of receiving the gospel. First is the set of people with hardened hearts. Next are those who allow worldly passion to hinder the gospel and third are those who are thirsty for the Good News. The onus lies on the Church planter to decipher by divine revelation the types of people among whom he desires to plant the Church.

Today, the established local church and other church planters need to re-evaluate the management or usage of these church planting resources. For example, in a situation where a church is blind to the leadership of the spirit in getting a direction for church planting, such a church may not involve in planting any church for decades. Also, when the seed, which is the word of God, is not properly 'planted' or when the truth of the word of God is compromised by a church planter, the church may not be effectively planted. Therefore, the effectiveness of the resources lies primarily in the effectiveness of their utilisation.

The four CP resources enumerated above are indeed indispensable. To these we may add other resources which could enhance or augment the four mentioned above. These include financial resources, material resources, spiritual resources of prayer and spiritual gifts, periodic church seminars on church planting,

and the experiences of experienced church planters. It should be noted that these other resources cannot replace any of the four major resources; however, they can compliment them. For example, financial resources can help "the Sower" to rent or secure space for the meeting of the new church. Likewise, the material resources can help provide literatures for the new church. The periodic church growth seminars can assist in empowering the leadership for more effective service.

Resources for Church Growth

When the Church has been effectively planted, the normal expectation is for it to grow. Church growth experts have identified three major types of growth. Wagner and Donald A. McGavran in the book *Understanding Church Growth* delineated these three major types of Church growth. First is biological growth which is derived through those born by Christian families in the Church. Second is transfer growth, This is a situation in which some members of a church for whatever reason transfer their membership to other churches. Thus, it is the increase of certain congregations at the expense of others. Third is conversion growth. Here, persons outside of the church commit faith in Christ and are brought, baptised and added to the Church.' Among the three kinds of growth, the most effective in fulfilling the Great Commission is the conversion growth. This kind of growth is as a result of deliberate efforts of the church to seek the lost for Christ.

Furthermore, church growth can occur in four distinct ways. First, is internal growth. This is the increase in the subgroups and quality of Christian lives of the members in a church. Second is expansion growth. This refers to the expansion of the congregation through conversion or transfer. Third is extension growth. This is the planting of daughter churches by the existing church among its own kind of people. And fourth is bridging growth. This refers to the attempt by congregations and denominations to find bridges to other segments of the population; multiplying believers other than their own kind of people.' It refers to starting of Christian congregations in other countries and languages. It is geographically removed from the mother church.

Since the most effective type of church growth is the conversion growth, what then are the resources for enhancing this type of church growth? Arguably, the first major resource for church growth in a local Church is the individual believer. Although the pastor has a vital role to play in the growth of a church, however, he alone cannot foster the required growth. In the various kinds of growth discussed above, and particularly, conversion growth, every church member must serve as a catalyst in planning and executing the evangelistic activities of the church. Every believer in Christ is a partner in the business of kingdom growth. How can church

members help in church growth? They can help through prayers for growth, giving for church projects, participating in evangelism and mission outreaches: Also, through church planting, life-style evangelism, committed Christian service, agape love for one another, meeting the needs of the indigent members and through intensive church publicity. In Acts of Apostles 2, it is clear that it was the attitudes and activities of the early believers which were blessed by God that caused growth. Therefore, if asked a million times, 'what is the major resource for church growth? I would answer a million times, believers in the church who truly reflect the Christ like life!

In the book, *The Complete Book of Church Growth* by Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner in an article "Three Growth Principles for a Soul-Winning Church," argued that the three basic principles which can foster growth are, first, a dedicated Pastor who leads the church to grow. Second is a congregation motivated for growth and willing to pay the price. And third, is a church which understands where it is and where it wants to go.' You will agree with me that these three resources for growth can be simply categorised as believers in the church. Whether it is the members or the leadership, they all belong to the group of believers in the Church.

Some Church growth exponents have stressed that the leadership of the church is the major resource for church growth. While not contending such claims; again, it can be argued that it is the members of the church, the believers who make-up the leadership. Hence, believers in the church who are led by the Holy Spirit in expressing love, sharing the Word, inviting others and demonstrating the power of God remain the most vital resource for church growth.

Challenges Facing Church Planting and Growth Challenges of Church Planting

_____ In the task of Church planting, certain challenges are obvious. These challenges tend to impede the process. A few of such would attract some brief comments. First is the challenge of misplaced mission priorities. Many churches and individual Christians do not set their mission priorities right. At the expense of church planting, some established churches often waste time in unprofitable debates, infighting, church politicking, etc. For some others, the goal is to be a viable money-making business venture at the expense of soul-winning. Such distractions should not be allowed to blind the church towards church planting. Rather, churches should prioritise church planting as a way of fulfilling The Great Commission of Christ.

In addition is the complacency of not wanting to lose some prominent members to the new daughter church: Often, some churches nurse the fear that once they start a new church, the 'big-guns' or well-to-do members may move to the new church. This could be true. However, the mother church must also realise that the transfer of such members to the new church is an avenue for other prominent members to join or be raised in the existing church. Another challenge to church planting is that of satanic activities. There have been cases where established churches desire to establish new churches, but, certain inexplicable hindrances such as the sudden demise of the Pastor or a prominent church member just occurs. In other instances, as the established church attempts to start a new church, government policies or religious riots may just occur which will halt the process. To overcome these challenges, the church must pray fervently to dislodge satanic opposition to the process, bearing in mind that the "Church is marching on and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it."

Other factors which may serve as challenges to church planting include, ignorance of the process, societal unrest, spiritual slumber, a misguided mission philosophy, leadership crises, etc. To tackle these challenges, the church must pray and in some areas seek for help from other churches and individuals that are experienced in the issue of Church Planting.

There was the case of a Baptist Church in Ogbomoso which following its establishment in 1981, planted her first daughter church 25 years later. Investigations show that leadership instability and internal crises were the major challenges faced by the church which impeded efforts towards church planting. Therefore, it is imperative for churches to strive for stability of her activities since it has consequences for her reproductivity.

Challenges of Church Growth

Many pastors and churches desire church growth, but not many of these churches are prepared for the challenges which accompany growth. As a baby grows, it is obvious that the parents become confronted with the challenges of getting new clothes which match the size of the child and also feeding the growing baby with the right kind of food. In a related way, when a church begins to grow, certain things must change. Often, these can be real challenges to the growing church.

The first of such challenges is the challenge of space. The first visible sign of growth is the increase in number. Such an increase puts the pressure on the church to seek a bigger space. In seeking a bigger space, the church must also

project for future growth. For instance, if the Church was in a room with 50 members, and soon after a year; they become 100; in seeking for a new place; the Church must rent or acquire a space which can seat at least 500 members, so that in the next four to five years, they do not go on seeking for a bigger space. In an interaction with some pastors and churches in Abuja, I discovered that the issue of space continues to be a big challenge. For example, the University Baptist Church in Gwagwalada, Abuja under the pastorate of Remi Badru has changed locations for the third time within four years. The church continues to grow as students troupe in, however, the church does not have a permanent place yet and so, they rent spaces in hotels. Another church in Abuja, the Triumphant Assembly under the pastorate of Duke Itetosan which was founded in 2004 continues till date to seek for adequate space.

In many urban centers, the nonavailability of adequate space to accommodate the growing church continues to be a great challenge. In cases where there are available spaces, some churches lack the funds to secure them. In combating the challenge of the constraints of space, established churches of similar denominations or financially buoyant churches could come to the aid of struggling churches. Again, the need for prayers by churches facing the challenge of space cannot be over emphasised. Through prayers, God can raise supporters for the church. Indeed, prayers can bring about victories we may never dream about.

Another challenge is that of 'closing the back door.' When the pastor and church members do intensive evangelism and publicity, the church in this way opens her 'front door' for people to come in. However, when the church fails to follow-up new converts, new members and other visitors, she opens her "back door" for them to leave or slip out of the church. For effective follow-up, the church must have the contact information of new converts and others attending for the first time. Such persons can be visited or called on the phone by the pastor or the visitation team of the church.

In urban centres such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Warri, Abuja and Kaduna among others; the hustling and bustling and societal dynamics may serve as a challenge in closing the 'back door' of the church. This should however not be an excuse. There are many technological ways by which churches can follow-up on new converts and members. Some of these include the mobile telephone, through electronic mails, through face-book and other similar devices. Thus, in this modern age, no church should have any tenable reason for not following-up new converts and members.

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Discipleship is also another challenge in church growth. The addition of new members and others to the church increases the number of persons in need of discipleship or training in Christ likeness. According to James B. Slack, "An ever-expanding discipleship base is the only effective way a church can continue to mature spiritually and grow numerically,"¹⁰ However, in a situation where there is insufficient personnel to serve as mentors and inadequate materials for discipleship, it can be really challenging to cope. The Church growth pastor and members must prepare ahead of time for both personnel and materials. Basic discipleship materials such as the Six basic lessons, In God's presence, Follow the Master, and others, can be purchased in good number ahead of time and leaders trained in preparation for a discipleship explosion. The goal is that the church must not only grow in quantity, but also in qualitative Christian living.

Other challenges which could confront the growing church include the need for more hands in the leadership, more time for batches of worshippers, more funding and the procurement of gadgets and technological equipments to cope with the growth. For instance, if the church has to erect canopies outside the building to cater for those that cannot be accommodated within the structure; there would be the need for projectors and screens to show the ongoing activities in order to carry all worshippers along.

Therefore, to neglect as inconsequential any of these challenges is to hinder growth in the Church. However, the wise church growth pastor and members would seek ways to address the challenges. It should be borne in mind that challenges could be peculiar to contexts; hence, churches must seek ways as led by God to overcome them in their own contexts.

Prospects of Church Planting and Growth

The prospects of church planting and growth are enormous. The term prospects can be viewed and understood in a variety of ways. However, I have used it in this paper to mean the possibility or chances of something good emanating from a process. In other words, what good can come out of church planting and growth? First, church planting and growth help to fulfil the Great Commission commanded by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. When churches are planted and grown, the chances are higher that such believers in Christ would be discipled and in turn disciple others.

Also, Church planting and growth provide individual Christians with the opportunities of using their spiritual gifts in the context of evangelism and missions: For instance, when the church is planted, the members of the congregation are given the opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts and potentials for the growth of the new church. As they do this, the church witnesses numerical and spiritual growth.

Furthermore, church planting and growth provide members of the congregation the chance for leadership development and Christian stewardship. The new group of believers soon sense the need to choose people to coordinate certain departments and activities of the church. Having prayed, certain individuals are chosen to lead the group. This provides such persons with the opportunity to develop and exercise their leadership gifts which otherwise may have been dormant. As they do so, the church experiences growth.

Another vital prospect of church planting and growth is that it can bring about a homogenous unit. This relates to a situation in which all members of a certain section of the society share some common characteristics, such as language, ethnicity, vocation and others.^{1°} The homogenous principle is not without its own criticisms. However, it can help to bring together different units of the society as they relate together in the faith to maximise their spiritual, academic, business or professional opportunities. The homogenous principle can be realised when people groups are reached with the gospel and the church is planted within the group. Owing to many common characteristics of such groups, the gospel is more likely to thrive, resulting into multiplication of churches.

It should be added also that when churches are planted and grown, they help to provide places of service for the increasing number of seminary graduates to serve as substantive or associate pastors. Other prospects of church planting and growth include, meeting the needs of indigent members as they fellowship together, supporting denominational growth, strengthening Christian witnessing, preventing spiritual idleness of church members and causing heaven to rejoice (Luke 15:1-10).

Practical Tips for Church Planting and Growth in Nigeria

Since 1996, the writer has been involved in church planting and growth. Perhaps two of such experiences are worth enumerating briefly. First, between August 2000 and April 2005, I served as Pastor at Gateway Baptist Church Ogbomosho. The church was planted through the visionary leadership of Samuel

Adeniran, the pastor of Idi-oro Baptist Church, Ogbomoso, the mother church on May 23, 1999: Later, on August 8, 2000, I resumed as the interim pastor of the church and met 32 members." When I was leaving the pastorate of the church 5 years later, I left a new Church building with a capacity to sit 500 and a membership of 235 people. Arguably, it was the commitment and the faithfulness of the members (believers) to the leading of the Holy Spirit that brought about the results.

The second experience is still ongoing at the Riverside Baptist Church, Ogbomoso. The church began through the church planting efforts of A.A. Adegoke, the former pastor of Ori-Oke Baptist church, Ogbomoso on February 2, 2005. Four years later in January 2009, I resumed as the interim pastor of the church. Upon resumption as the Pastor, I met a membership of 118 people. Three years now as the Pastor, the church has moved to her permanent site and a church building with a capacity of 1,500 worshippers is under construction. At present, the regular membership is an average of 190 people per week and during special marathon prayer programmes, we record an attendance of about 250 worshippers. Again, it must be noted that the members' commitment and faithfulness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit have been the key factors for growth.

Within these years of involvement in church planting and growth, I see certain essential tips which can assist in the planting and the growth of the Church. First is the issue of a visionary pastor who carries along his members and altogether get involved in Church planting and growth. Second is the need for flexibility. Any church that is rigid in terms of strictly following programmes without allowing God to sometimes 'interrupt' her activities may not do much in church planting and growth. Next is the need for consistent prayers. The socio-economic and security challenges in Nigeria have made people to resort to prayer. The wise church will cease this opportunity to provide avenue for prayers. Through such prayers, lives can be won for Christ.

Another vital issue is the involvement of youths in the life and activities of the Church. The glory of the youths is their strength. The wise pastor will not restrict the youths, but rather show love and provide guidance to them. In addition is the need for life transforming messages. This requires the Pastor to receive messages directly from God. Sermons which touch hearts are sermons received from God. It must be added that miracles create explosion growth of the church. The task of the Pastor is not to hunt for miracles, but to create in the church atmospheres for miracles. One vital way of doing so is to promote and ensure love within the believers.

One other vital tip is creativity. The pastor must be creative in structuring programmes which would attract people. Forexample in the 'ember' months of September,October, November and December, we organise a special monthly prayer tagged, "Ibi oni balemi", meaning evil will not be my portion. Also, of recent, we held a prayer programme,tagged,"Asale Adura Ajaku Akata", meaning the night of persistent prayer.Through these special prayers,the church continues to attract new members. Other tips include helping indigent members with food and money, observing monthly love feasts, intensive publicities,having good church sign posts, printing qualitative digital colour church bulletins and others.

Conclusion

This paper has been on the resources,challenges and prospects of Church planting and growth. It has been demonstrated in this paper that the processes of planting and growth do not just happen accidentally; rather, they are carefully planned and worked towards. It is such planning and efforts that God blesses with anincrease.

You would have observed that I did not lay any emphasis on the issue of money or funds. This is deliberate. The reason is simply because the major need in church planting and growth is not money but people.In the last 15 years,I have discovered that the issue of importance first and foremost in church planting is the believers and not money. A philosophy I have lived by in these processes has been the philosophy of Hudson Taylor, who was a missionary to China,who has been described in historyas the 'Father of faith missions.' According to Taylor, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply,"² Like Taylor, we can say that the church planting and growth done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

Endnotes

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