

Leadership Styles and their influence on Church membership growth: A Study of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church Kianungu District Nyamira County

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Abstract: Efficient church leadership is core in the numerical growth of church membership. Therefore, the style of leadership adopted by a Church leader will have a bearing in the growth of membership. Poor leadership styles have led to a drop in membership, even for Churches that began with a high membership. A notable example is that of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church Kianungu in Nyamira, which over the years has recorded a downward trend in her membership. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of church leaders on Church membership growth. Therefore, one of the specific objectives of the study was to find out the leadership styles applied in Christian churches and its effect on membership growth. The study employed Robert Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership as articulated by Burkus (2010). The study employed a descriptive survey method and data was collected through structured Questionnaires. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted. Primary data was interpreted and synthesized through qualitative methods which employed a quick impressionist summary and thematic analysis. Validity of research instruments was established before data collection. The study findings showed that the growth of church membership is affected by the leadership styles adopted by the members. Despite the fact that there are other factors contributing to Low Church membership growth such leadership conflicts, poor remuneration of pastors, and weak establishment of programs, poor leadership style is a key factor. The ultimate goal of the study was to come up with possible ways on how to adopt the best leadership style that may be used by church leaders in the PAG church to increase the numerical membership growth. This study may also serve a reference material for research in the field of church leadership and membership growth.

Key words: Church leadership, Leadership styles, membership growth, PAG church

1. Introduction

The growth and success of the early church mainly depended on the abilities of the church leaders. This was demonstrated by the powerful preaching of the gospel by Peter which led to the conversion of 3000 people who joined the early church in a single day (Acts 2:41-47). It can be noted in scripture that the increase of church membership is the initiative of the Holy Spirit working through men, the tongues of fire that rested upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost was a theophany that came to impart a missionary purpose upon them. Eims (2008) narrates that it is the responsibility of the church leaders today and their congregants to carry out the mission of God in making him known to the world. Church leaders are responsible for the success or failure of a church. God holds leaders responsible for what takes place in the ranks. It is through responsible and able leaders that God keeps his people in the right direction. Without good leadership the vision and mission of a church cannot be achieved.

It could be noted in scripture that the churches established by Apostle Paul were able to reflect the attributes of God in appropriate ways within different cultural contexts due to good leadership empowered by the Holy-Spirit. This can be traced in the book of 1st Timothy and Titus. But the modern Christian Church seems to be departing from the Pauline principles of church leadership and this has greatly affected the growth and survival of church. The level of understanding anticipated from both church leaders and their followers is missing in most cases and this at times results into conflicts in the church (Jayson, 2016). Church growth has been closely linked with leadership, such that without effective leadership, the ability of a church to achieve sustainable growth is constrained (Muturi, 2009). The church leaders have a responsibility to plan and conduct evangelism, as well as to provide spiritual nourishment to new followers and nurture them to become committed members of their congregations.

The objective guiding this study was to determine the leadership styles adopted by the church and their relationship to church membership growth. The study is significant due to the fact that growth of organizations depends on effective leadership, and the Church is no exception. It relies on its leaders to provide strategy, vision, and guidance in the day-to-day operation of its activities. This assertion is supported by Weems (1993) who posits especially the quality of the pastor's leadership is of great value in the life of the church. Associating success to leadership, Maxwell (2005) argues that "If you want to succeed, you need to learn as much as you can about leadership before you have a leadership position." There is general agreement that there remains a

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research gap between church leadership and church growth, an area to be given much attention (Bae, 2001; Stovall, 2001; King, 2007; Steen, 2008; Burton, 2010; Hagiya, 2011; Stewart, 2012). Therefore, this particular study bridges the gap on the role of leadership on church membership growth.

This study was guided by Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership theory as expressed by Burkus (2010). According to Burkus (2010), the most effective leaders are servants of their people and they get results through whole-hearted attention to their follower's needs. The servant leadership theory emphasizes on collaboration, trust, empathy, and ethics. The assumption of this theory is that if leaders focus on the needs of their followers, the followers will reciprocate through increased team work and be engaged to better performance. The philosophy of servant leadership theory is to meet the needs of the organization and provide a climate for its followers to grow and develop as human beings. This can be realized by valuing people and developing them by providing learning opportunities, modeling appropriate behavior and building others by encouragement.

2. Different types of church leadership styles

The main responsibility of church leaders is to influence others to work together willingly on related tasks to attain that which the organization desires. Before the modern concepts of leadership came into being, the apostle of Jesus Christ had their own styles of leadership to ensure sustainable growth and survival of the church and these has remained the model for the church for ages. The apostle entirely depended on the guidance of the Holy-Spirit from time to time. According to Benincasa (2015) leadership is a process of personal influence by which a leader shapes the attitudes and activities of others towards the attainment of the organizational objectives. Oluwasegun (2005) defines leadership as the ability to gain consensus and commitment to common objectives beyond organizational requirements. Further, James Koroma (2015) defines leadership as process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in ways that makes it move in a cohesive and a coherent manner.

According to Dairo (2004) Leadership is the art of getting things done. It can be learnt, improved, developed and perfected. Leadership style is the way a person uses power to lead other people; the most appropriate leadership style depends on the function of the leader, the followers and the situation (Benincasa, 2015).

In essence Christian leadership has unchanging values and principals such as morality, servant hood, and respect for people but the style of leadership varies depending on the individual leader and the situation in which leadership is exercised. A well developed and mature leader has the capacity to exercise different styles of leadership in different situations (Eims, 2008). In times of a crisis a leader may use an authoritarian style, while in a decision making situation the leader may call for consensus-building. Whitney (2016) states that leadership styles are not fixed it is the situation that dictates which style can be used. Specific situations help leaders to determine the most effective style of interactions. Sometimes leaders must handle problems that require immediate solutions without consulting followers while in some occasions consultation is vital.

2.1 Autocratic leadership

In autocratic leadership style leaders make decisions on their own without consulting subordinates or any other dependents. The leader makes decisions, communicate them to subordinates and expect prompt implementation. Robyn Benincasa (2016) urges that autocratic leadership is centered on the boss where by the leader holds all authority and responsibility. Autocratic work environment does normally have little or no flexibility. Autocratic leadership does not give room for guidelines, procedures or policies to be followed; instead this type of leadership dictates situations. Statistically, there are very few situations that can actually support autocratic leadership.

The advantage of this leadership as cited by Gill (2014) is quick in decision making since authority is vested in the leader. There is also complete control of the followers by the leader as compared to other forms of leadership. The disadvantage of this style is that it has open doors to dictatorship. It doesn't give room for consultations with followers. Lutzer (2016) states that autocracy is taught in scripture, elders are to have actual power to lead, control, and make decisions on church matters.

2.2 Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership involves free participation, freedom in expression of ideas, sharing of responsibilities, justice, competence, courage, and honesty. Olson (2014) states that democratic leadership is one of the most preferred styles of leadership applied in different governments and church organizations. Democratic leadership unlike autocratic is centered on subordinates' contributions in making decisions. The democratic leader holds final responsibility, but he or she is known to delegate authority to other people, who determine work projects. The most unique feature of this leadership is that communication is done in various ranks within the organization.

Democratic leaders have the ability of solving complex issues since they work collaboratively using a consensus of opinions. In democratic leadership power is vested in an elected or chosen leader who influences others to act. Neil (2013) states that the advantage of democratic leadership is that responsibilities are delegated to other team members hence facilitate member participation in decision making. It also empowers group members to accomplish their tasks.

Since democratic leadership applies the principal of equal participation, the members deliberate freely on issues affecting their organization and they arrive on a common decision on a consensus basis. This gives everybody a sense of inclusively which makes the decisions made to be accepted by the majority of the group. In this regard Burkus (2010) observes that delegation of responsibilities and duties among members becomes effective this facilitates participation and results in good production. According to Whitney (2016) democratic leadership has the advantage of empowering group members to accomplish their goals by training them and keeping them informed this fosters good results. Olson (2014) asserts that democratic leadership is suitable in solving complicated issues since it offers the ability to work collaboratively by ensuring team spirit and mutual communication among members. On the other hand that democratic style of leadership has disadvantages also Dairo (2004) observes that

democratic leadership may be affected by indecisiveness during times of crisis. This may lead to prolonged decision making, in matters of urgency democratic leadership may not help. During times of a predicament when directional leadership is needed democratic leadership can be uncertain. Another disadvantage of democratic leadership is time consuming because it gives consultation a priority which may bring about procrastination of urgent issues.

Moses was advised to apply democratic leadership by Jethro in governing the Israelites (Exodus 18:24). He followed the advice and established a hierarchical structure for solving conflicts among the peoples of Israel. This reminds us about the power of delegating authority to others and sharing of tasks which relieves individual leaders from being overburdened.

2.3 Strategic leadership

Whitney (2016) observes that strategic leadership is the ability of influencing others to make voluntarily decisions which can enhance the growth of an organization in a long term period. The strategic leader is engaged to a wider audience at all levels who want to create a high performance in the organization. The strategic leader is not limited to those at the top of the organization. The strategic leader provides a prescriptive set of practice and fills the gap between the need for new options and the need for delivery of services. Burkus (2010) writes, Strategic leadership makes a better future since it focuses on the future to foresee opportunities. This style of leadership clearly defines goals of the company by so doing the company may make better business decisions. The disadvantage of strategic leadership is that it involves a complex process which may not be understood by followers.

2.4 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership aimed at initiating change in organizations and groups. In agreement to Dairo (2004) this type of leadership motivates others to work as a team for high achievement. The followers of this style of leadership get more committed and satisfaction as a result of the empowerment from their leaders. Prophet Nehemiah in the Old Testament sets a good example of transformational leadership in his efforts of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:17-20).

The Advantages of transformational leadership is that the vision of the group is well communicated to followers to get everyone on board. There is also the ability to inspire and motivate followers; passion and enthusiasm are key traits that enable transformational leaders to succeed. The disadvantage of this style of leadership is that leaders may misuse their influence to act unethically (Neil, 2013).

2.5 Charismatic leadership

In describing charismatic leadership Whitney (2016) narrates that Charismatic leadership is based on heroism character of divine origin. This is leadership where by the leader manifests his revolutionary power to transform the follower's values and beliefs by affecting their normative orientation of attitudes. The leader uses his or her personality to gain the admiration of followers, charismatic leaders are effective communicators. Charismatic leaders motivate employees to broaden their abilities and offers growth opportunities for workers. This type of leadership improves working environments thus leads to high production.

Dairo (2004) remarks that while followers may find inspiration through this leadership style, they may also rely too heavily on the leaders in charge. This makes the followers to lack zeal of making valuable contributions to the organization. The leader may fail to bring all the followers into board. This leadership style lacks successful succession. In case the leader dies or quits the group it leaves the followers without knowledgeable successors and this affect the future performance. Olson (2014) observes that charismatic leadership lacks clarity in seeing dangers affecting the organization; this is because the charismatic leader is confidence on his own abilities. Further, this type of leadership style does not give opportunities to mentor others into leadership because the leader enjoys controlling others and therefore denying them opportunity to handle duties.

As noted by Burkus (2010) one of the advantages of charismatic leadership is that it creates emotional appeal by inspiring and motivating followers to action. This creates a strong connection of loyalty between the leaders and his followers. This leadership style also encourages open communication which creates a healthy working atmosphere for workers. One of the greatest charismatic leaders in history is Martin Luther King who brought about great change in the religious society by shaping peoples thoughts and beliefs through his inspiration (Muturi, 2009).

2.6 Laissez- fair leadership

The Laissez-fair leadership gives authority to employees and workers according to departments or zones to work without interference. Benincasa (2015) describes this style of leadership as "delegative" leadership. It allows group members to make their decisions regarding their responsibilities. Team leadership is also identifies as a style of leading by focusing and setting future goals. It brings about inspiration and direction to followers. Team leadership tends to work by putting trust in cooperate relationship. It encourages personal development and values innovation. Olson (2014) argues that this leadership may be failing due to lack of skills. It also requires a lot of supervision and it takes time to adapt to changing circumstances. This style of leadership is the least effective in management and leads to the lowest production. The Laissez-fair style of leadership requires skilled manpower who can work without supervision. Whitney (2016) notes that this leadership style gives a better opportunity to workers to demonstrate their knowledge which makes them grow their skills and expertise.

2.7 Cross-cultural leadership

In discussing cross-cultural leadership, Benincasa (2015) argues that cross-cultural leadership is a style of leadership applicable in different environs which can be applied in the missionary work. In this type of leadership the leaders identifies with different cultures, he/she respects and upholds them. Just as stated earlier there is no leadership style which is perfect at all times.

Those in leadership positions should seek to lead using different styles as situations may dictate one major advantage of cross cultural leadership is that it brings diverse experience and broad thoughts. Its disadvantage is that high performance is rare. In this study the researcher was interested to discover whether cross-cultural leadership style is applied in Kianungu PAG church district.

3. The relationship between church leadership style and membership growth

Church administration is a paramount requirement for doing effective ministry. Indeed churches grow while others decline depending on the type of leadership exercised. A leader is a person with a God given capacity and responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people towards God's purpose (Warren, 1995). Christian leaders should seek to influence God's people towards God's purpose and resist the temptation of influencing people towards self.

The influence of leaders on membership growth is critical. As Brown (2008) concedes all things raise and fall on leadership, church growth depends greatly on its leadership abilities. Jakes, (2016) outlines some strategies applicable for church growth for any church organization; he argues the leaders who intend to grow their church must create a mission statement that gives church planting and evangelism apriority; this gives them the opportunity to gather their resources around a common goal and vision. The church leaders must involve the community by building a good relationship with the people and the local authorities in a given locale and keep on communicating to them that, that church exists to serve them.

Mahoney, (2009) concedes that Christian leadership in the 1st century was purely a responsibility of men who directly received a divine calling from God. The calling of the prophets in the Bible like Elisa, Elijah, Jeremiah, Moses, Samuel, Amos, Isaiah, and others is a clear portrait of how God called leaders to lead his people. The kings that God raised in Israel were both political and religious leaders. They had the responsibility to deliver the people of God from their enemies and influenced the people to the worship God. Brown (2008) asserts that leadership in the Old Testament was established in three main institutions, the Temple, the Sanhedrin, and the Synagogue. The temple was ruled by the priests (Numbers 25:10-13) while the Sanhedrin council was the religious and political institution. The synagogue was a place of prayer and asocial centre controlled by men.

In the New Testament Miller (2011) observes that formal leadership can be categorized into three types; Charismatic, Familial, and Appointive. Charismatic leaders received a direct call of God like Paul and Barnabas, Familial leaders were blood relatives of Jesus like James, and Peter and Appointive leaders were humanly appointed or elected. The idea of appointing church leaders in the early church was as a result of the administrative issues raised from different groups in the church. The choosing of the seven deacons in the book of Acts 6 who were of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom inaugurated a new dispensation of electing church leaders which the church has followed to date. The teachings of Christ on servant leadership (Mathew 20:26-28) laid the foundation for leadership in the early Christian church. As the early church grew its leadership also grew to meet the needs of the growing numbers.

Njiri (2010), the general superintendent of the KAG church asserts that vision and strategy for KAG church growth is that every local church gives birth to a new church for the period of five years. This is made possible by identifying people with interest and talents in ministry and sponsoring them for basic training, after which they are sponsored to open new churches. The KAG head office buys land/ plots for new churches and supports them with 50% of their sanctuary constructions. This is indeed a great encouragement to pastors and members which needs to be emulated. Such vision can be realized when church leaders are committed to the task of fulfilling the great commission. The church leaders are indebted to provide guidance, inspiration, and guidance to their congregations towards the achievement of the vision of the local church. It is the responsibility of church leaders to demonstrate courage, enthusiasm and commitment in nurturing the talents of their church members towards achieving a common goal.

Eims (2008) argues that the achievement of organizational goals and objectives depends on its leaders. In any institution it is the leaders who set the agenda and influence the personnel in that organization to achieve the best performance. Good leaders motivate the workers by giving encouragements and rewards. The type of leadership that may influence church growth requires justice, fairness, honesty, and integrity. When these traits are practical in leadership the workers get inspired and put all their abilities to better performance. In addition to this a good church leader must have a clear idea of where they want to go, he/she must be able to articulate his /her vision fervently to bring all the participants on board to make them contribute their individual efforts towards the growth of the church.

Listening to criticism is a prerequisite in mature leadership. Warren (1995) states, that a church leader should lead by example and never let pride, envy, guilt, or any other temptation to lure him/her from the bath of service to which God has appointed him /her. Njiri (2010) speaks on church leadership as servant hood to Christ and one another. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant (Mathew 20: 26). Glory, power, honor, fame, does not come as a result of position in leadership. The motive for leadership should not be anxiety to exercise authority but to serve. Gathuki (2015) concedes good leaders should demonstrate expertise on the task for which they lead and have skills needed for that leadership. They should have good interpersonal skills, be good communicators and have good personal traits. Good church leaders should demonstrate integrity in their responsibilities; good leaders must work within the context of a prescribed moral ethics in any profession.

Good communication with clarity and conciseness is a prerequisite for successful church leadership Communication in leadership involves listening and responding appropriately. It also involves sharing information and clarifying misunderstandings within the organization (McGauran, 1987). Good communication motivates and energizes others towards a common goal. Good communication skills facilitate decision making which allows the team to capitalize on opportunities.

The respect of authority is fundamental to successful leadership; church leadership is answerable to civil and divine authorities. To go against any governing and ordained authority is unethical and is to go against God's will (Romans 13:1-5, Hebrews 13:17) Church leaders should seek to relate to all people with respect and sensitivity. Without respect of authority it is difficult to accept the recommendation and directives coming from that authority. The Word of God urges us to respect authority

as one of the means of solving our conflicts. (Hebrews 13:17, Romans 13: 1-4) this study sought to establish whether the PAG church leaders respect the ecclesiastical protocols and authority in their governance.

Sunghoon (2014) concedes that Prayer is a vibrant element in the growth and increase of church membership. Church leaders who make impact and cause more people to join their local assembly are those who pray together, methods, goals, programs, and plans without prayer may become dry and short-lived. In Acts 2:1-4 the believers were in one place, praying and waiting for the promise made by the Lord Jesus upon his ascensions. They patiently waited with one accord and the Holy Ghost came upon them; they were filled and were enabled to move far and wide to spread the gospel message. Prayer is like the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink, it is a necessity for survival in the Christian realm. McGauran (1987), the father of church growth movement argues that prayer is a human partnership with God's divine initiative to revive the Christian church to bring about growth and expansion.

4. RESULTS

The study constituted 99 respondents drawn from 6 pastors, 39 Assembly committee members, and 54 Church members. The questionnaires were structured according to the objectives of the study with the results as follows. The pastors' response on leadership styles adopted by Kianungu PAG Church district, 4 respondents (66.6%) indicated that leaders were democratic, 1 respondent (16.7%) autocratic and 1 respondent (16.7%) charismatic. Therefore, other leadership styles such as strategic leadership style, Laissez-faire leadership style, and Cross-cultural leadership styles have not been adopted by any pastor.

According to the study findings, 13 assembly committee leaders (37.1%) indicates that their pastors have adopted autocratic leaderships style, while 16 assembly committee leaders (45.7%) indicates that their pastors have adopted democratic leadership's style, 4 assembly committees (11.4%) indicates that their pastors have adopted strategic leadership's style, 2 assembly committees (5.1%) indicates that their pastors have adopted charismatic leadership's style, and no pastor has been ascribed to adopt the transformational, laissez-fair and cross-cultural leadership.

On the other hand, 27 church members (50.0%) indicates that their pastors have adopted autocratic leadership's while 18 church members of 33.3% indicates that their pastors have adopted democratic leadership style, 3 church members (5.6%) indicates that their pastors have adopted strategic leadership's style, 2 church members (3.7%) indicates that their pastors have adopted charismatic leadership's style, 3 church members (5.6%) indicates that their pastors have adopted laissez-fair leadership's style, 1 church member (1.9%) indicates that their pastors have adopted cross-cultural leadership's style, and while none in the transformational leadership. This gave contrary views compared to the responses by the pastors and assembly committee members. Therefore, according to majority of members their pastors were autocratic leaders, while the pastors themselves feel they are democratic.

It is evident from the study that democratic leadership is the most preferred style of leadership in Kianungu PAG church district. As cited by Olson (2014), democratic leadership style however, has its own limitations and disadvantages; democratic leadership style is characterized by the philosophy of team work and corporate decision making. The democratic leader relies on opinions and suggestions of the group hence he/she makes no personal decisions. The leader only rubber stamps the decisions the group has made. As a matter of fact, there is no single style of leadership that can be effective at all times and in all situations, certain situations may call for a particular style of leadership to be exercised as discussed in chapter two. This is in accord with the situational theory of leadership as expressed by Benincasa (2015)

5. Conclusions

The study established that although majority of pastors claimed to be practicing democratic type of leadership style, a larger percentage of the congregants at Kianungu Church district perceived their leaders as having adopted an autocratic leadership style. Further this was said to be affecting the numerical church membership growth of the district. The main features of democratic leadership are decentralization of authority and participatory planning through mutual communication, a factor that is likely to positively influence church membership growth. The autocratic leadership style which seemly is practiced in Kianungu PAG Church district lacks the element of consultation and denies participation of members in key decision making of the church hence affecting numerical growth. The leader is left working alone in an environment that lacks flexibility. In conclusion is need for adopting various leadership styles depending on situation and circumstances because every style of leadership has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, charismatic leadership and servant leadership give direct interpersonal relationships with people through visitation and one on one witnessing, which are essential for numerical church membership growth.

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