THE ROLE OF CHURCH LEADERS IN ADVANCING CHURCH GROWTH

An Action Research Project

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**SECTION II**

**ACTION PLAN**

The action research plan addressed the role of church leaders in advancing church growth. A participatory action research strategy was used to examine processes and practices that can enhance church growth. The approach was anchored on humanistic and theological theories. The plan of action was consistent with the humanistic theory of structural functionalism. This theory emphasizes the significance of functional coordination, social norms, and values in maintaining social control and soundness. The action plan helped reinforce the practical coordination of church leadership and advance the traits and beliefs essential for the growth of the church community. The observational method was critical in enhancing the data collection process and enabled the research to meet its objectives.

**Research-based Intervention**

The research addressed the role of church leaders in advancing church growth in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP). The approaches to the intervention depended on the nature and extent of the organizational milieu (evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability). A demographic survey and questionnaires were used as the research-based intervention.

The intervention occurred in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) over five weeks. The participants in the research were the clergy of the respective congregations in the Moravian Church (EWIP), lay ministers of Christian education, lay pastors, supplementary ministers, acolytes, members of the executive boards, and the provincial board. Consent was obtained from the provincial board before conducting the research.

The Moravian Church was chosen due to its history of evangelization, missions work, and the present decline in church growth. The demographic survey and questionnaires were used to gather data on the numerous leadership procedures and techniques that can contribute to the church's growth. The thematic analytical method was employed to categorize concepts and ideas into themes, sub-themes, and properties. Categorizing concepts and sub-concepts produced significant themes and sub-themes that served as the foundation for analysis. The researcher will subsequently secure all the required resources, and advanced preparation will be completed for implementing the intervention.

The action research project informed the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the advancement of personal and collective church growth. Information was disseminated to the selected participants through a demographic survey and questionnaire responses facilitated through Survio, a web-based survey software. The survey and questionnaires were designed to collect supplementary demographic data regarding the church’s leadership, including, but not limited to, age, gender, leadership status, and the number of years in leadership.

The survey and questionnaires allow for information collection in a structured and organized manner. The information acquired from the intervention can give church leaders the information they require to draw judgments about improving their leadership practices and growth approaches. A successful outcome of the research intervention will be the participants’ observation and commitment to become equipped and empowered to make disciples who make other disciples as they advance the church’s growth while fulfilling the great commission. The intervention comprised a demographic survey and questionnaires that were functional and practical instruments to gather information on the leadership practices and strategies that can advance church growth (McGraw et al., 2019).

**Sociological Integration**

The humanistic theory, also known as structural functionalism, is the theory most suited to undergird the study. According to functionalists, society is a complex system whose components are interdependent, interconnected, and interrelated (Ameyaw et al., 2021). The functionalists contend that several aspects of society work together to foster unity and stability. Theorists view political, religious, educational, marital, economic, and health institutions as organizations that can collaborate to advance stability. Ameyaw et al., 2021, asserted that,

A defect in any part of the structure leads to social intractability, which ignites social instability. Herbert Spencer linked the structure of society to the parts of the human body (Turner, 2012; Rumney, 2017). He argues that the various parts of society (Social Institutions, social norms, values, or beliefs and behaviors) work together to keep society functioning, just like the organs of the human body work together to keep the body active **(Durkheim, 2014) (p. 261).**

**Émile Durkheim was a renowned sociologist known for his theories on the nature of society. Durkheim was acutely interested in the growth and operation of traditional and contemporary cultures. Social facts, defined as societal norms, beliefs, and institutions, were the foundation for Durkheim's theories (Malik & Malik, 2022)**.

**Durkheim supported Spencer’s analogy of the good functioning of the human body with society’s ability to function well (Durkheim, 2014).** Theologians can assert that Durkheim’s theory of the functioning of the human body may be grounded in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, that references unity and diversity in the Body [of Christ]. 1 Corinthians 12:12 states, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (New International Version, 2011).

The thought known as structural functionalism suggests that society should be visible as a multi-dimensional organization of interconnected pieces that safeguards society, its social framework, and its union. In this light, the church is perceived as a social framework that assumes a part in the upkeep and protection of social requests and dependability in society (Jo et al., 2021). The decline in church membership in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) reflects the methods and sustainability factors in the Moravian Church (EWIP). For example, how new members are welcomed and discipled, continuing education for leaders in the church, and periodically assessing and re-assessing population change in the society and the church are essential in ascertaining the progress and sustainability of the community of faith (Chemin, 2021; Fowler, 2019).

The structural functionalism school of thought identifies strong points in social designs that call for practical coordination (Fowler et al., 2019). When applied to the church setting, practical coordination alludes to the most common way of ensuring that the church’s leaders and members help each other understand the process of advancing church growth. The research-based intervention gathered data on the leadership teams in the Moravian Church (EWIP) using a demographic survey and questionnaires. The research results provided vital data that can be utilized to advance church growth.

Furthermore, structural functionalism accentuates the meaning of social norms and values while maintaining social requests and strength (Perry et al., n.d.). The church’s foundation is built on Jesus Christ, and His believers embrace shared values and beliefs. The church’s values and beliefs play a significant role as they impact the lives and direction of the church members and leaders. Researched-based intervention can be used to analyze and enhance social norms and values that are fundamental for the development of the church community (Namunyuka et al., 2022).

Structural functionalism recognizes the meaning of social institutions as a fundamental part of the upkeep of social demands and consistency (Rathmell et al., 2019). The church is a social organization that contributes to developing cultural norms on both the cultural and social levels. Researched-based intervention can add to the conservation of social demands and security in society by encouraging the joining of practical cycles inside the church and cultivating church growth (Kim, 2021).

As a rule, the structural functionalism theory offers a supportive system for grasping the decline in church growth and formulating interventions to resolve the issue (Martin, 2021). Structural functionalism centers around the connection between design and capability. Structural functionalism theory can assist people with grasping the mind-boggling elements of the church as a social framework and devise fruitful techniques for reinforcing its growth and effect in society (Ameyaw et al., 2021; Scott, 2023). The theory centers around the meaning of practical incorporation, social norms and values, and social institutions. The theory assists us with understanding the church's capabilities as a social framework (Scott, 2023).

**Theological Integration**

Advancing church growth requires going back to basics, the Word of God. The Bible reflects the church’s blueprint for growth (Kinoti & Nteere, 2021). According to the Bible, the church is Christ's body, and its growth is crucial to achieving God's mission for the world (Genesis 12:2-3; Matthew 28:19-20). The research-based intervention accentuates evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability. Advancing church growth requires good leadership. The concept of leadership was first introduced by God, modeled by Jesus, and adopted by humanity (Chauke, 2020). Good leadership styles can enhance society and the church. Biblical leaders like Moses and David exemplified vital characteristics for effective church leadership, like vision, boldness, and lowliness in daily routines and interactions with others (Ferreira & Chipenyu, 2021). The research-based intervention would gather information on the leadership qualities that add to church growth and give valuable experiences that can be utilized to fortify leadership within the church (Bochere et al., 2021).

Examining the church's theological foundations and beliefs is fundamental for the church’s growth. For example, a church with more accentuation on the legalistic regulations that should be followed may drive individuals away (Alawode, 2020). In contrast, a church that places a more significant amount of accentuation on the adoration of God and service to its members can attract new members looking for spiritual satisfaction (Alawode, 2020). When church leaders comprehend the theological thoughts and values that help their members, they can make more intentional decisions about encouraging church growth (Bochere et al., 2021). Spiritual growth and maturity will result in the church’s expansion locally and globally.

**Summary**

Churches are struggling with fulfilling the Great Commission and advancing church growth. A plan of action has been fostered to promote church growth that accentuates evangelism, teaching, stewardship, leadership, and flexibility. The intervention is grounded in research that pinpoints leadership approaches that add to the expansion of churches. The intervention included the utilization of a demographic survey and questionnaires. The tools will enable church leaders to acknowledge and embrace the areas of concern that require improvement and devise a plan to advance church growth. Moreover, the plan offers a comprehensive answer to the issue by including a social and theological perspective.

The survey incorporated inquiries regarding the leaders' level of involvement and dedication in their positions and responsibilities within the church and whether they feel valued by their peers. The data was analyzed employing descriptive procedures and creative methods to identify patterns, examples, and subjects. The findings will be used to develop approaches and action plans to address the identified areas for improvement in advancing church growth. The results can also serve as a standard for future assessments and evaluations.

The intervention can extend church leaders' information base and range of abilities, which can aid in advancing church growth. It is anticipated that implementing this plan will also foster a culture of innovation and change, which are essential for the church's growth and development. A starting point to advancing church growth can be found through the blend of humanistic and theological perspectives and leadership development.

**SECTION III**

**IMPLEMENTATION**

The researcher secured permission to conduct the action research intervention; evidence of permission is a letter *(see Appendixes A and E).*

Participants were protected by agreeing to an Informed Consent Document *(see Appendix B)* before completing the data collection tool.

**Location and Duration**

The research was based in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP). The Moravian Church was selected due to its history in missions and evangelism and the current decline in church growth. Complete access to the church leaders promoted the amount and quality of data gathered from the research.

The duration of the intervention was five weeks. The participants in the study were the clergy of the respective congregations in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (EWIP), lay ministers of Christian Education, lay pastors, supplementary ministers, acolytes, members of the executive boards, and the provincial board. Consent was obtained from the provincial board before conducting the research.

**Data Collection Tools**

The data collection tool consisted of questionnaires and a demographic survey. Open-ended and closed questionnaires *(see Appendices C and F)* were used to collect data from participants before and after the intervention.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Contact was made with the Chairman of the Provincial Board of the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province. The chairman was provided a letter of introduction written by the researcher that was shared with all participants in the research. The introductory letter described the study and the importance of the church leaders’ participation.

Data were collected for a period of five weeks. Approximately fifty participants were expected to engage in the research process. The data collection tool consisted of questionnaires and a demographic survey. The forms were distributed among the church leaders. They were allowed to remain with the documents for up to two consecutive weeks. It gave them sufficient time to reflect on their responses before answering the questions. Surveys/Questionnaires were favorable since they facilitated the collection of copious amounts of data from the research participants (Thabtah, 2019). The survey/questionnaires utilized both open-ended and closed questions. The questions were organized logically to promote the transition from question to question.

The researcher maintained the integrity of the data during the research process. Data integrity was ensured by collecting information from the church leaders; leading questions were avoided. Further, bias was limited. Maintaining the respondents’ integrity was done through blinding, where the research participants were unaware of the other participants’ responses.

This action research evaluated the researcher’s engagement in an advisory role to the denomination’s leadership during the period of five weeks in introducing strategies to curb attribution and promote church growth in the aftermath of the recent COVID-19 crisis. The researcher organized the data for analysis and coded them using Survio, a web-based survey software to host online surveys and questionnaires. Participants were given an email link with a distinct code identified with each survey. They also answered a short survey on church leadership *(See Appendix F).* Participants were asked to enter a unique code that was associated with data collection and analysis. The data collected were analyzed and reported.

The study commenced in May 2023 and concluded in June 2023.

Results of the pre-intervention and post-intervention data were evaluated for patterns and themes.

**Expected Outcomes**

The intervention highlighted three points. First, an understanding of pastoral leadership practices that can enhance church growth. Second is the need to adequately equip the saints for ministry work. Third, the effects of team-based leadership in growing the church.

**Summary**

The research was based in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP). The quantity and caliber of the data acquired from the research were enhanced by full access to the church leaders. The participants were members of the clergy and lay leaders in the MCEWIP. Data were collected with a demographic survey and questionnaires. The intervention lasted for five weeks. The study commenced in May 2023 and concluded in June 2023. Successful problem-solving measures included a grasp of pastoral leadership techniques that can promote church growth. Effectively equipping the saints to fulfill the Great Commission or discipleship and stewardship training and promoting and imaging team-based leadership that can result in church growth.

**APPENDIX A**

**Pre-Intervention Introductory Letter for Project Sponsors**

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

My name is Rev. Anique Elmes-Matthew, Ph.D. I am conducting an Action Research Project toward completing the Doctor of Social Leadership (DSL) program offered by Omega Graduate School, Dayton, Tennessee. The research focuses on church leaders' role in advancing church growth. To this end, I request your participation in this important project by completing a brief survey.

The study outcomes will include an analysis of the reported role of church leaders in advancing church growth in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province. The expected benefits of this study are an increase in the knowledge base and skill set of church leaders in advancing the church through evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability.The study consists of a demographic questionnaire and a survey related to the leadership and ministry of the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP).

A software platform hosts the online survey that provides maximum security and integrity using industry standards for compliance and certification. Please click the link below for the online Letter of Consent and survey.A QR Bar Code is also provided; individuals can read this QR code using a smartphone, which will provide immediate access to the survey.

Thank you for participating.

**Survey URL:** <https://www.survio.com/survey/d/aem-arp23>

**QR Bar Code**

Shape

Description automatically generated with low confidence

I am grateful for your consideration and greatly appreciate your time and participation in this research project.

Anique Elmes-Matthew, Ph.D.

**APPENDIX B**

**Research Study Consent Form**

Research: Anique Elmes-Mathew, Ph.D., Doctoral Candidate, Omega Graduate School.

**Researcher’s statement**

Please read and consider the information carefully before agreeing to participate. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to decide whether to participate in the study. You may ask questions about the intent of the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the study or this form that is unclear. This process is called “informed consent.” You will receive a copy of this form for our records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The research focused on church leaders’ role in advancing church growth. To this end request your participation in this important project by completing a brief survey. The study outcomes will include an analysis of the reported role of church leaders in advancing church growth in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP). The expected benefits of this study are an increased knowledge base and skill set of church leaders in advancing the church through evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability. The study consists of a demographic questionnaire and a survey related to the leadership and ministry of the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP).

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

Each church leader participant that provides access to the sample population is provided an introductory letter that describes the study. Data is collected from the responses to the online survey and subsequently exported into a spreadsheet for analysis.

Within two weeks of completing this survey, church leaders will be asked to participate in a 10-question survey that will focus on the major themes of the research. The questions will be organized logically to promote the transitions from question to question. The researcher will maintain the integrity of the data during the research process. The questionnaires will take at most 10 minutes to complete. The data will assess church leaders’ role in advancing church growth.

**Letter of Consent**: <https://www.survio.com/survey/d/aem-arp23>

**ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY**

Participation is optional.

**BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

The expected benefits of this study are recognition of the role of church leaders in advancing church growth and encouraging prevention and intervention to decline in church growth. The data collected can provide insightful information for church leaders to use in enhancing church growth.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

The information you provide will be confidential. All data is coded by a unique identifier associated with your answer the researcher has no access to identifiable data the data collection does not elicit information that would require mandatory reporting (i.e., child abuse, or harm to self or others).

**Subject’s statement**:

The study has been explained to me, and I volunteer to participate in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. There are no significant risks expected from participating in this study. If I have questions later about the research, I can contact the researcher listed on the first page of this consent form.

I have read the above information and received answers to any questions. I offer my consent to participate in this study.

**APPENDIX C**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Thank you for participating in this research study. Please answer each of the following questions.

1. What is your age range?

18 - 36

37 - 54

55 - 72

73 – 90+

1. Gender (M/F) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your Native Language?

English

Spanish

French

Other (specify)

1. Race/Ethnicity – Check all that apply.

Black/African American

Hispanic/Latino

White/Caucasian

Asian

Native American

Biracial/Multicultural

1. Current Relationship Status

Single

Married

Separated

Divorced

Widowed

1. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

* Less than a high school diploma
* High school degree or equivalent (GED)
* Some college, no degree
* Associate degree (AA, AS)
* Bachelor’s degree (BA, BS)
* Master’s degree (MA, MS, MEd)
* Professional degree (MD, DDS, DVM)
* Doctorate (DMin, DPhil, EdD, Ph.D.)

1. What is your current employment status within the church?

Full-time employment

Part-time employment

Leave of Absence

Furloughed

Secondment

Retired

Volunteer

1. Which income group does your household fall within (total income from all adults)

* Less than $20,000
* $21,000 – $30,000
* $31,000 to $40,000
* $41,000 to $50,000
* $51,000 to $60,000
* $60,000 to $75,000
* Over $75,000

1. How many adults are living in your household?\_\_\_
2. How many children 17 years and younger are living in your household?\_\_\_\_
3. Conference Affiliation

Antigua

Barbados

St. Kitts

Trinidad

Tobago

Virgin Islands

1. What is your leadership status?

* Full-Time Clergy
* Supplementary Minister
* Clergy, Probationer
* Lay Pastor
* Lay Minister of Christian Education
* Acolyte
* Executive Board (Laity)
* Provincial Board (Laity)

1. How long have you worked in or have been in leadership in the following Conference(s)?

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

Antigua

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

Barbados

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

St. Kitts

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

Trinidad

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

Tobago

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

Virgin Islands

(0-5 years) (6-10 years) (11-15 years) (16-20 years) (Over 20 years)

**APPENDIX E**

**Post-Intervention Introductory Letter For Project Sponsors**

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

My name is Rev. Anique Elmes-Matthew, Ph.D. I am conducting an Action Research Project toward completing the Doctor of Social Leadership (DSL) program offered by Omega Graduate School, Dayton, Tennessee. The research focuses on church leaders' role in advancing church growth. To this end, I request your participation in this important project by completing a brief survey.

I appreciate the time that you took to complete the first survey. I am requesting your assistance in completing a post-intervention survey of five (5) questions. These questions reflect the constructs of evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability.

The respondents who took the initial survey are encouraged to use the same unique ID that you used in the first survey to 'sign' the consent form.

• An example of a way to remember the ID you selected in the first survey is to use the first 2 initials of your last name, the first 2 initials of your first name, and the last three digits of your phone number or birth year. Example: ElAn233.

• Respondents who did not complete the first survey are strongly encouraged to complete this important follow-up survey using the same ID format as the persons who completed the first survey as noted above. ElAn233.

A software platform hosts an online survey that provides maximum security and integrity using industry standards for compliance and certification. Please click the link below to access the online survey. A QR Bar Code is also provided; individuals can access this QR code using a smartphone’s camera, which will provide immediate access to the survey.

Thank you for participating. Your responses are critical to ascertain the role of church leaders in advancing church growth through evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability.

To access the survey, copy and paste the following URL into your web browser.

<https://www.survio.com/survey/d/B4H-aem-actionrp23>

or access using the following QR Bar Code.

QR Bar Code

A picture containing pattern, symmetry, square, art

Description automatically generated

I am grateful for your consideration and greatly appreciate your time and participation in this research project.

Anique Elmes-Matthew, Ph.D.

**APPENDIX F**

**Post-Intervention Respondent Questionnaire**

Please complete the post-intervention survey of five (5) questions. These questions reflect the constructs of evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability.

1. What additional resources are needed from MCEWIP to adequately support its staff and members in the work of the ministry?
2. How can the Executive Board aid church leaders in feeling appreciated and valued by the board?
3. How might ministerial staff be better equipped to care for and nurture members of the congregation as they engage in church leadership?
4. How can church leaders engage in social action reform (help for underserved or marginalized populations) as they engage in culture leadership?
5. In what ways can I seek out challenging opportunities to test my skills and abilities?

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