THE ROLE OF CHURCH LEADERS IN ADVANCING CHURCH GROWTH

An Action Research Project

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**SECTION IV**

**REFLECTION**

 This study aimed to identify church leaders’ role in the church's growth. Data were collected over a period of five weeks. The data collection process consisted of questionnaires and a demographic survey. This chapter reports the results of this research study findings.

**Results and Evaluation**

The sample consisted of 30 adults 18 and older who consented to participate in the pre-intervention data collection. The sample for the post-intervention data included 33 respondents 18 years and older. Participants live in the Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts, Tobago, Trinidad, and Virgin Islands Conferences of the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP). The intervention was implemented in May 2023 and concluded in June 2023.

Data were analyzed according to demographics, including age, education status, leadership status, and conference affiliation. The themes identified between the pre-intervention and post-intervention data were evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability.

*Pre-Test Data*

This section summarizes participants’ responses to the items in the demographic survey and the church leader self-assessment questionnaire.

**Figure 1.**

*Respondents by Age Range*

The sample comprised 30 respondents aged 18 to 90. Fifty percent of the respondents were between the ages of 55 and 72.

**Figure 2.**

*Education Status*

Respondents were asked to state the highest level of education attained, choosing from the following categories: Less than a high school diploma, High School or equivalent (GED), Some College, Associate Degree (AA, AS), Bachelor’s (BA, BS), Masters (MA, MS, MCJ, MPH), Professional (MD, DDS, DVM), and Doctoral (DMin, DPhil, EdD, Ph.D.). Responses ranged from 5.88% with High School/Equivalent degrees to 17.65% with a Doctorate. Eight-point-eight percent had some or no degree. Five-point eight percent had an associate degree. The most significant number of participants, 35.29%, had a bachelor’s degree. Twenty-point-five percent had a master’s degree. Participants who obtained a professional degree equaled five-point eight percent.

**Figure 3.**

*Leadership Status*

The church leaders included members of the clergy, lay pastors, acolytes, supplementary ministers, and lay members on the executive and provincial boards. Full-time clergy represented 47.06% of the data collected, lay pastors 2.94%, lay minister of Christian education 2.94%, acolytes 26.47%, laity on the executive board 14.71%, laity on the provincial board 5.88%. Respondents under the supplementary minister and clergy probationer category did not complete the survey (0%).

**Figure 4.**

*Conference Affiliation*

The Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) comprises six conferences (Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts, Trinidad, Tobago, and the Virgin Islands). The six conferences consist of nine islands, including St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John (United States Virgin Islands), and Tortola, British Virgin Islands. Clergy members may be called to serve in any of the six conferences or nine islands. The data reflect that 56% of the respondents resided in the Virgin Islands Conference, 14.71% in the Antigua Conference, 2.94% in the Barbados Conference, 8.82% in the St. Kitts Conference, 5.88% in the Trinidad Conference, and 11.76% in the Tobago Conference.

**Figure 5.**

*MCEWIP Adequate Resources*



The responses to whether the MCEWIP has adequate resources to support its staff and members indicated that the church does not provide adequate resources to support its staff and members.

**Figure 6.**

*I Feel Appreciated and Valued by the PEC and the Executive Board*

The number of responses to the questions I feel appreciated and valued by the PEC and I feel appreciated and valued by the Executive Board yielded the exact responses. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents stated that it is seldom true or occasionally true that they feel appreciated and valued by the Provincial Elders’ Conference (PEC). The PEC is the administrative body of the church. The board consists of three ordained ministers, two elected laypersons, and one member who was co-opted to serve as the treasurer. The Executive Board is the administrative arm of each conference. The Executive Board consists of two members of the clergy and three lay members.

Twenty-point-five percent of the respondents noted that the question did not apply to them. Twenty-six percent said it is mostly true that they feel appreciated and valued by the PEC and Executive Board, and fourteen-point seven percent said they always feel appreciated and valued by the PEC and Executive Board. According to Ficarra et al. (2023), trust and a sense of appreciation are vital in creating an organizational culture and enhancing social relations between management and staff.

**Figure 7.**

*Ministerial Staff, Personal Growth and Development*

Thirty-two percent of the respondents stated that it is mostly or always true that ministerial staff take advantage of learning opportunities for personal growth and development. Investing in the leadership and development of church leaders is critical to the church’s growth. According to Krispin (2020), the spiritual vitality of a church begins to wane in the absence of capable leadership. The responses indicated that more staff members must engage in learning opportunities for personal growth and development. The Ministerial Code of Ethics in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) asserts, “I will develop and maintain the professional skills that my ministry requires by regularly undertaking appropriate professional development and by maintaining membership in relevant professional associations, e.g., ministers’ fraternal; Christian Councils” (p. 5).

**Figure 8.**

*Ministerial Staff: Direction and Insecurity*

Church leaders asserted that forty-one percent occasionally felt insecure about their work and needed direction (41.18%). Additionally, 26.47% and 5.55%, respectively, said that they mostly, and it is almost always true that they felt insecure about their work and needed direction. The research indicates that church leaders in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) need guidance and security while leading the church in this unprecedented and changing world. Jikong (2020) stated, “Pastoral Leadership is not spared from the phenomenon of insecurity... Courageous Pastors/leaders are emotionally intelligent enough, culturally competent, and spiritually humble to acknowledge their insecurities and seek help” (p. 3).

**Figure 9.**

*Ministerial Staff – Congregation Receives Needed Care*

Fifty percent of respondents affirmed that the ministerial staff occasionally ensures that the entire congregation receives needed care. According to Bolsigner (2020), “the training that [pastors] received needed to be augmented with a different kind of leadership” (p. 6).

**Figure 10.**

*I Engage in Social Action Reform*

Seventy percent of the respondents declared that it is occasionally, seldom, or almost never true that they engage in social action reform (help for underserved or marginalized populations). Whereas different congregations or churches are involved in community service, church leaders must be awakened and engaged in “progressive social change efforts amid ongoing religious disaffiliation” (Delehanty, 2020, p. 1228). According to Ireland (2021), the church plays a central role as an agent of social change.

**Post-Test Data**

The post-intervention questionnaire was developed after reviewing the initial survey questions and comparing them with servant, transformational, and humble leadership styles considering five constructs: evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability. The five questions that made up the survey were:

1. What additional resources are needed from the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) to adequately support its staff and members in the work of 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?

The leadership style(s) and construct(s) that were identified with each question are as follows:

Q1. Servant Leadership and Stewardship.

Q2. Transformational Leadership and Team-Based Leadership.

Q3. Servant, Transformational, and Humble Leadership and Discipleship.

Q4. Servant and Transformational Leadership and Evangelism.

Q5. Transformational and Humble Leadership and Adaptability.

The themes that emerged from the post-intervention survey included personal and professional development, particularly continuing education, leadership training, and enhanced and open communication. Other themes were staff evaluation, additional and intentional staff support, greater accountability from staff, professional counseling services for church leaders and members of their families, greater cultural awareness across conferences, and consistent and effective leadership from church leaders. A culture of trust and respect among church leaders and collaboration between other churches and organizations in the community are other themes that emerged from the study.

The research reflects the need for church leaders to understand their role as leaders in these changing times, rethink the church’s practices, and how they engage the work of ministry. Packiam (2022) noted that church leaders serve in a unique role and have been adversely challenged by a rapidly shifting culture. Church leaders in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (EWIP) are encouraged to remember that their goal is to have an authentic relationship with God and work together as God’s disciples in fulfilling the Great Commission. Putman et al. (2013) asserted that

we need to raise biblical disciples and deploy them into the world so they can raise other disciples... Develop a biblical vision for your church, create a common language and definition of terms... consistently live out your vision, and constantly assess, correct course, and encourage (p. 230).

Effecting change that will transform the world and advance God’s Kingdom first requires transformation on the inside. Change begins with God’s human agents living the faith they profess and modeling Jesus Christ their example while fulfilling the Great Commission, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

**Results of the Intervention**

The results of the interventions suggest that the church has entered a new era where church leaders are called to rethink and retool as they engage in the work of ministry (Bolsinger, 2020). There is a clarion call for church leaders to intentionally focus on how they can facilitate church growth. The church’s administration, fellow church leaders, and members are encouraged to support church leaders in personal and professional development to be better equipped to lead the church in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The research question is “How much of the decline in church growth in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) is attributable to church leaders, and what can church leaders do to facilitate the church’s growth?” According to Myers (2020), “...true church growth occurs when the people who make up the church grow spiritually into Christlike maturity through loving service toward others” (p. 275). Church growth requires a willingness to change and be transformed by the Holy Spirit (Herrington et al., 2020). The research reflects that there is a dire need for church leaders in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies (MCEWIP) to engage in self and faith-reflection, personal and professional development, honest and open communication, team-based leadership, adaptability to cultural changes and shifts, equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Church leaders can facilitate the church's growth by acknowledging and accepting the need for transformation through spiritual growth, development, and Christlikeness. Myers (2020) affirmed, “When the church focuses on growing into healthy spirituality and Christlike maturity, it is then that God will work to add more people to the church as He sees fit” (p. 281). Jesus asserted in Matthew 16:18, “..on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” According to Whitesel (2020), “Today, the Church must again be led by the Holy Spirit guided by women and men who are not afraid to adjust methodology while retaining orthodoxy” (p. 41). Being open to change in one’s attitudes, perspectives, strategies, and actions will aid church leaders in increasing the church’s relevancy in the world and fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

**Personal and Professional Reflection**

As I journeyed through the research process, I reflected on the origin of the Moravian Church, its zeal for missionary work, and the expansion of God’s Kingdom from the first missionary journey in August 1732 to St. Thomas, Danish West Indies (Known today as the US Virgin Islands). Hutton (2017) indicated that the passion for expanding the Moravian Church in the Western Hemisphere was a burning desire to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all oppressed peoples.

In addition to preaching the Gospel, the Moravian Church Missionaries were pioneers in education. The missionaries provided an education for the enslaved people. The Moravian Church was one of the first organized religious bodies to establish primary and secondary schools for enslaved people in the West Indies (Hutton, 2017).

The Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) often boasts about its rich legacy in missionary endeavors, education, music, and other contributions to religious, social, and cultural heritage throughout the Caribbean and the world. The first great revival in modern-day church history occurred among the Moravians on August 13, 1457, in Berthelsdorf, Germany (Greenfield, 2013). The first round-the-clock prayer meeting in church history occurred in the Moravian Community of Herrnhut in Saxony, Germany, in 1727. The prayer meeting continued non-stop for over one hundred years. The Moravian Church still observes the prayer watch throughout the worldwide Moravian Community (Hubbard, 2022). Knowing the legacy of the Moravian Church and the potential to do even greater works today, the questions that plagued my mind throughout the research process were, “Where did we go wrong?” “How do we once again become a church on fire for God while evangelizing the world?” Hebrews 10:23 asserts, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” The Moravian Church needs to “Think outside of the church.” As the mother of Missions, the Moravians need to get back to basics, fulfilling the Great Commission, even if it means sacrificing some of its “sacred” traditions.

**Implications for Leadership**

The results of this action research project are relevant to lead change in society because church leaders are encouraged to look at themselves, who they are, whose they are, what they have been called to do, to whom they have been called to be, and the changes that are necessary to correct the church’s ineffectiveness in aiding the church’s growth. Branson and Martinez (2023) stated that the church is God’s change agent. God calls church leaders and members to fulfill the Great Commission while being intentional, relevant, and effective in winning souls for the Lamb of God. According to Davis (2021),

We must acknowledge, accept, learn, embrace, and master cultural change, especially those resulting from Digital-Transformation, by pro-actively becoming “Positive-Force” Change-Agents in shaping cultural attitudes and norms. The alternative is to resign the Church to the continued steady decline in attendance and membership that stems from an increasing cultural irrelevance that is well underway and which may pose an existential threat to our Church and the world it serves (p. 149).

The results of this action research project are relevant to lead change in society, but the key is to lead change that will last (Havens, 2023 & Quinn, 2008).

The changing times require leadership in a new and unsettling way. Vaters (2020) asserts that change is accelerating; therefore, churches that refuse to change can experience decline or eventually die. As the Moravian Church reflects on its current state, being missional-minded, open, and receptive to fast-paced change is critical for its growth.

The dominant leadership theory that supports the results of this action research project is transformational leadership. According to Ming et al. (2021), change is theprimary focus of transformational leadership. Individuals, groups, and organizations use the transformational leadership style to produce constructive change in different spheres of life. In transformational leadership, leaders work beyond self-interest to inspire their followers to achieve their personal goals (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). According to Davis (2021), “Transformation is a core Christian competency” (p. 164).

[Jesus] used the existing communications tools of his day, "one-to-one" and "one-to-many" (evangelizing by "walking around"), meeting people where they lived, and being accessible to those in need of His message of love. In the process, He changed the world while re-branding the cross from an instrument of torture and death into a symbol of everlasting life and a worldwide icon of hope (p. 166).

Jesus Christ was the first Christian change agent in the world.

To effect the change required to develop its staff and members, members of the provincial and executive boards are encouraged to model the excellence required of those they lead. Additionally, church leaders must be good role models to members of their congregation and the community (Nicolaides & Duho, 2019). Chemin (2021) and Gaib et al. (2023) asserted that team-based leadership that promotes honest, open, and transparent communication encourages autonomy, allowing persons to be creative and effect change that may help the organization achieve its goals. Gaib et al. (2023) affirm that growth is influenced by transformational leadership. According to Rainer (2020),

The opportunity to lead change is likely greater than any other point in our lifetimes. Without a doubt, the world has changed. Without a doubt, western culture has shifted; And it has shifted largely against churches. Without a doubt, most church leaders have not been trained and equipped for this new season.

The church can embrace what Davis (2021) calls ‘“Churchpreneurs,” people who make creativity and innovation part of [the church’s] new DNA. ...take more risks ideating and developing new ministries, missions, and operational structures need to bring more people to Christ” (p. 124). Davis also said

perhaps we all need to follow Jesus’ lead and simplify the Church to save it. As Church-Leaders, we need to embrace change, not fear it, for otherwise, we will certainly fail in our duties. And lastly, we need to redefine our churches for a new population that right now either doesn’t know we exist because we’re not a part of the daily conversation they’re in or who outright reject us based on misconceptions and mistrust. The choice is ours (p. 124).

Ofori (2021) notes that the church is primarily about people and helping people positively transform their lives; therefore, transformational leaders motivate and encourage positive development for their followers. Muthuku et al., 2023 contended that transformational leaders foster a work environment with clear values, priorities, and standards. To fulfill the great commission, church leaders must model Jesus’ example as a transformational leader (Ming et al., 2021).

**Implications for Social Change**

The results of this action research project can help advance constructive social change through church leaders’ willingness and ability to engage in continuing education and equipping the saints for ministry through evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability. Parks (2021) affirmed that God has equipped the church, which is also the community, with all the resources it needs to provide long-term solutions that will offer sustainable outcomes to God’s people. Davis (2021) proposed that a divine shift in mindset and learning a new framework are necessary for church leaders to transform their sphere of influence collaboratively.

The church and its leaders are responsible for meeting society's different needs. The Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province (MCEWIP) has the potential and resources to bring together diverse local churches to mobilize, collaborate, partner, and maximize the use of shared resources toward achieving a common goal of fulfilling the Great Commission. Throughout Scripture, Jesus ministered to the needs of all people (Davis, 2021). Jesus’ life in His community was relational; therefore, the church’s mission must begin with building healthy relationships with others.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

 Parks (2021) asserted that the church, God’s change agent, is viewed as irrelevant and out of touch with reality. Strommen (2020) said, “The church must be reshaped in order to hear the concerns of a new age and speak the gospel to people in a powerful way” (p. 59). There is a need for future research to include assessing the pulse of the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies (MCEWIP) from the congregational viewpoint. Additional research is needed among church leaders at the conference and congregational levels to ascertain their giftings using the Clifton Strengths Assessment and the Enneagram. According to Ryan and Mosher (2021), humans are naturally social beings; thus, encouraging teamwork and teambuilding is crucial. Having staff complete the Clifton Strengths Finder Survey and the Enneagram to determine their top strength is one strategy for fostering togetherness.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Whether or not a church grows or declines depends on the church’s leadership. There was insufficient knowledge about what church leaders needed to do to evoke the substantial expansion of the church and its congregations. According to Schulz et al. (2019), church growth may depend on the church’s historical, sociological, societal, economic, and spiritual status, leadership, and practices. Further, various churches have different practices and principles that can aid their growth. To achieve church growth, church leaders must transcend overarching differences. According to several authors, churches are healthy when they align with God’s plan (Bolsinger, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Vaters, 2020).

Church leaders play a critical role in the church’s growth as leaders are responsible for building trust and open communication. Vaters (2020) said that trust is the currency of leadership. Church leaders are responsible for building healthy relationships and tending the fields so that the church may produce crops. The church is crucial in advancing God’s Kingdom through evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, team-based leadership, and adaptability (Sastrohartoyo et al., 2021). The church is called to be Great Commission Christians with an outward focus on winning and nurturing souls for the Lamb (Rainer, 2020). God’s power and people’s obedience to God will transform the world.

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