



Evaluation of the Conflict Among the Modern and the Orthodox Churches in Abia State, South East Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The study was carried out in Abia State, South East, Nigeria, many churches are going through conflicts that involve pastors and church leaders. The orthodox and modern churches were purposively selected because of their leadership problems. In this study, 150 members including, lay leaders such as Elders, Deaconesses were randomly sampled in orthodox and modern churches respectively (N = 300). During the data collection linked scale was used to measure the degree of responses on causes of conflict. Analysis was done using descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean and standard deviation.

Objectives: This study assessed conflict among the Modern and the orthodox in Abia State.

Methodology: The research method use comprises of structural questionnaire, oral interview and church history documentation and the research concept for this study includes the conceptual frame work, design and instrument for data collection, sample size of the population and data analysis. Attitudinal and interpersonal conflicts is the major types of conflicts in Modern church (64 - 66%). While ethnic, attitudinal, interpersonal and inter group conflicts were the major types of conflicts in orthodox (56 - 63%).

Result: Lack of pastoral leadership and forceful implementation of new ideas were most serious conflicts in both orthodox and Modern members church which were reported by 60.7 - 82.3%, spiritual immaturity of the pastors 89%, Claiming ownership of the church ranges 55% to 69.4%. Emotional and spiritual hurt from burned out pastors 87% and 85.4% of the members respectively, distraction, ineffectiveness of ministry, envy and jealousy.

Recommendation and Summary: This study also identified methods of handling conflict to include; making peace, prayer, using the word of God, correction of issues causing the conflict and showing love. To avoid conflict, it is recommended from this study that pastors should use participatory method in decision making by involving members to avoid unacceptable ideas. Burnout pastors should go on vacation, reduce office hours, take rest, and retreat in prayers and studying the word. Spiritual immature pastors should go for Bible training school. The relevance of this research is that, it addressed the conflict in these churches.

Keywords: Church; Conflict; Causes; Risk

Background of the Study

In the church, all interpersonal disputes are symptoms of deeper problems impacting or involving the whole body. Church conflicts are all actions trying to divide the body of Christ and involve leadership. Some studies that were conducted on church conflict across the world included those of Leas Speed B. and Kiyoun Chang. The internal and external conflicts and the glaring negative impact and its resultant ungodly trends is prevalent in many churches today. Many churches are going through conflicts that involve pastors and church leaders on one hand and pastors and church members on the other hand. The churches in Abia State are not exceptional. However, review of recent literature has shown the existence of little work on church conflict in Nigeria, including Abia State. Hence, this study will assess conflict among the Modern and the orthodox churches in Abia State with the view to learning and implementing the principles and strategies for solving practical church problems biblically and effectively.

Alfred [1] suggested that, unifying diverse persons requires team work which calls for shared and timely leadership. The team-based church is best because it helps pastors, leaders to grow together into powerful fellowship of leaders. Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ reminds Christians of vital truths about the based-team ministry. Distrust Increased through Repeated Conflict: Members attribute every problem that exists to their pastors. They will not admit pastor's authority. They members even try to exclude their pastor; if their pastor shows a strong leadership in order to fix the problems of the church. Thus this kind of church needs the doctrine of the right church ecclesiology. A new pastor must make an impression on church members that he is faithful and competent pastor However, when this attribute is not found in the new pastor, it triggers conflict. As members of the church increases, conflict triggers because new personalities emerges and the old personalities will be unhappy. Also, seed of destruction enters the body in healthy growth, secondly, if discipline process does not keep pace with the growth, thirdly if the growth is not God sent but man-made. It is a false assumption that growth means divine blessing since quantity instead of quality has never impress God. Fast growth without in-depth discipleship can provides satan a space to display [2]. This study has revealed the tendency of conflict with increased membership in both churches. When pastors have heavy pressure when facing spiritual problems and often

deny his spiritual immaturity, secondly, instead of seeking help, he prefers to stay with the problems which is hypocritical [Ibid 19--]. When pastors are involved in so many activities and give less attention to the spiritual life of his members, at this point the pastor will experience degeneration in his spiritual life and in turn create emotional and spiritual hurt in members which can lead to conflict.

Materials and Methods

Study area

The study was carried out in Abia State, Nigeria. Abia State lies between latitude and longitude climate, population of Modern and orthodox members. The research concept for this study include the conceptual frame work, design and instrument for data collection, sample size of the population and data analysis. The population for this study comprised the Modern and the orthodox which were purposively selected for this study. This is because these both have been going through leadership tussle. All the pastors and lay leaders (elders, deacons and deaconesses) in both churches were purposively selected and random sampling technique was used to select 150 members from each. The total sample size was 300 including pastors, leaders and members.

Instrument for data collection and data analysis

Data was collected through the use of questionnaire. The questionnaire contain relevant questions on the objective. covered questions on causes of conflict. The data collected were analysed using simple statistics such as frequency and percentages.

Results

The result in figure 2 indicated that 52.3% of Modern Church members strongly agree that forceful implementation of new ideas without considering existing structure in the church trigger conflict by the members while 43.3% and 45.3% strongly agree that lack of understanding on the pastor's temperament by members and immature behaviour of a pastor causes conflict respectively.

The results also revealed that members in Modern Churches in Abia State agree that lack of pastoral leadership (54.4%), lack of attention to existing church tradition and Christian culture (54%) trigger conflict in the church. Other sources of conflict reported that were of concern were immaturity of pastor's behaviour (45.3%), increase distrust through repeated conflict in the church (46.2%), frequent changes of senior pastor (40.2%) (Figure 2).

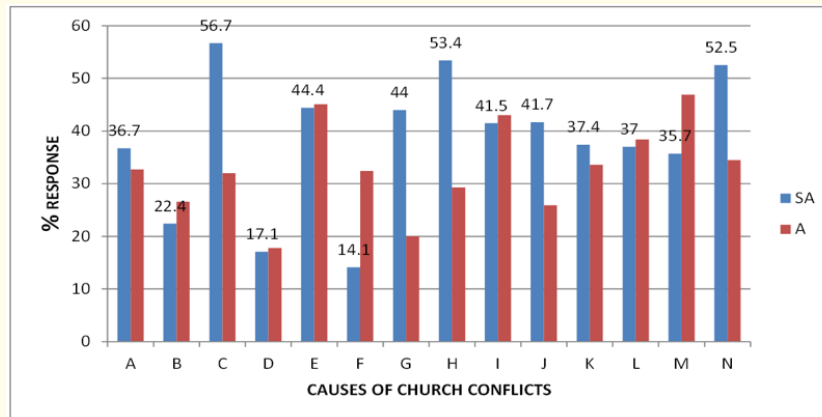


Figure 1: The Results in figure 1 showing causes of conflict indicated that 52.5, 53.4, 56.7% of the orthodox. Church members Strongly Agree that church members experience emotional and Spiritual impact from the Pastor, lack of pastoral Leadership, and forceful implementation of new ideas trigger conflict respectively. The results also revealed that members agree that the immature behaviour of pastors (45.1%), secret sin and lack of communion with God by the pastor reduces the effectiveness and operation of the pastor (46.9%) and also increased distrust in a pastor as a result of repeated conflict (43%) lead to conflict in the church (figure 3), other causes of conflict reported include pastors seeing themselves as the owner of the church, membership increase, church members regarding a new pastor as spiritually immature man, lack of attention on existing church tradition by a new pastor, lack of understanding on the pastors temperament by members.

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree A = ownership, B = membership increase, C = Change of old structure, D = Culture of church E = Immature pastor, F = Opinion on new pastor, G = Stanic, H = Leadership, I = Distrust J = Lack of attention on mode of operation by new Pastor, K = frequent change of pastor, L = Disposition of pastors, M = Burnout pastors, N = Emotional & spiritual hurt of members.

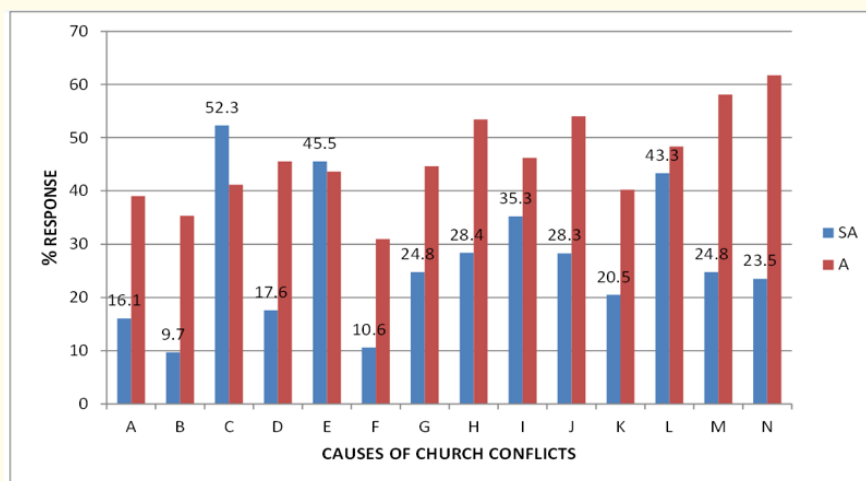


Figure 2: Causes of Conflicts in Modern Churches.

S A = Strongly Agree, A = Agree A = ownership, B = membership increase, C = Change of old structure, D = Culture of church E = Immature pastor, F = Opinion on new pastor, G = Stanic, H = Leadership, I = Distrust J = Lack of attention on mode of operation by new Pastor, K = frequent change of pastor, L = Disposition of pastors, M = Burnout pastors, N = Emotional & spiritual hurt of members.

Discussion

This conflict due to change of senior pastor was a serious problem in Modern Church and orthodox Church. However, it is a more serious case in orthodox that 70% members reported compared to 60.7% response from Modern. If a new pastor fails to pay close attention to the existing church tradition and culture. When this occurs, the pastor will face resistance and rejection from church members. The new pastor must consider his leadership style which must not differ from his predecessor in order to avoid conflict. The cause of this conflict was reported by 82.3% members of the Modern Churches while 67.6% of orthodox Church members reported it, thus the case is more serious in Modern Churches than in orthodox Church. When pastors, president and founders of churches have feeling of ownership of the church, this tendency trigger church conflict. This source of conflict was severe in orthodox Churches than in Modern Churches. The present study recorded more responses [69.4%] in orthodox and 55.1% in Modern Churches. This study indicated that 89.5% of orthodox members and 88.9% agreed that this immaturity of pastors affect members and caused conflict. The study indicated that 49% and 45% of the orthodox and Modern members agreed that numerical growth triggers conflict respectively [3-11].

Summary and Conclusion

The most serious causes of conflicts identified in orthodox church were structural, theological, spiritual and emotional. This study identified attitudinal and interpersonal conflicts as the major types of conflict in Modern churches While ethnic, attitudinal, interpersonal and intergroup conflicts were the major types of conflict in orthodox churches. The investigation on causes of these conflicts in the present study revealed that structural causes of church conflict such as lack of attention on existing tradition of the church by a new pastor and frequent change of Senior Pastor, lack of pastoral leadership and forceful implementation of new ideas were most serious conflicts in both orthodox and Modern churches. Spiritual causes such as spiritual immaturity of pastor was also a serious source of conflicts reported by the members of orthodox and Modern churches. The members of orthodox and Modern respectively reported the issue of burned out pastor who gives imbalance attention to the members because of his tight schedules outside the church while of members from the both churches respectively agreed that church members experience emotional and spiritual hurts when there is lack of spiritual impact from the pastors.

Disclosure

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The research work was accepted by the participants after explanation of the importance to the study. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information. The management of the churches gave their consent and also participated in the survey.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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