
Church Planting and the Attendant Challenges in the Ekiti Provinces of the Redeemed Christian Church of God

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined church planting in the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Ekiti Provinces. In the Redeemed Christian Church of God, church planting is one of the visions of the church that must be fulfilled yearly across the globe. This to an extent has made the church to be visible everywhere, Ekiti State inclusive. The work noted that church planting is biblical as this could be confirmed in the ministry of Jesus and Paul. Using both qualitative and quantitative method with personal observation, the work revealed that in the five provinces in Ekiti, the church has a grand total of 942 Parishes, making the church to be the fastest growing church. However, it was observed that in spite of the ultimate goal of glorifying God and making disciple of new believers as the main motive behind this drive, the church is confronted with many challenges of which poor attendance, funding, location and effectiveness and integrity of people who lead the newly established churches have been of major issues that the church needs to address. The work also noted that, some of the members of the church, having known the challenges of the newly established parishes, believed that instead of planting more, there is need to consolidate the existing ones in order to avoid the problem of having half-baked Christians or followers. In the light of this, the paper recommended that there should be review of the church philosophy of planting new parishes in terms of visions, mission, location and integrity of people chosen as leaders so that their main objectives would not be defeated or rubbished by the society.

KEYWORDS; *Church Planting Challenges Provinces Church Parishes*

INTRODUCTION

Church planting is a process that results in a new Christian church being established. It is a necessity for Christians for the purpose of the propagation of the gospel especially in strict compliance with the injunction of Christ that believers should go into the world and preach the gospel to all nations. Church planting does not only help to discover the talents of members (especially the ones that are made leaders among them) and enhancing their God given potentials; it also provides an environment for fostering new and creative approaches – exploring new possibilities for biblical and relevant expressions of church that honor God and reach friends with the gospel. It may also prove to be the most significant way to hand on faith to new generations (Kooistra 2011, p 12). Every believer (minister) and pastor should be involved in some way in church planting as the population is increasing on daily basis. Although, it can be argued that church planting is not only the most effective means of reaching more secular people as fresh approaches to worship and evangelism also gives new life to many .

As much as church-planting is being encouraged, each planter and team is expected to pray and work through the process that challenges them to think about having a new church and mission. In other words, the aim and purpose need to be strictly adhered to. Meanwhile, church planting today has become unusually challenging as many seem not to clearly and systematically follow the full complex and principles it involves. This is because some denominations have actually abused the idea behind church planting to the point that there is now unhealthy rivalry, competition and contestation for space even within the same denomination. It is with this understanding that this paper aim at examining the challenges of church planting and its implications for socio-religious life in Nigeria.

For the purpose of clarity therefore, this work will be focusing on the five Provinces in the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Ekiti State. The Redeemed Christian Church of God in recent time has been one of the foremost denominations that engaged in rapid church planting all over the country. This is as a result of the vision of the General Overseer that the church should be five minutes' walk to one's house though not applicable to workers because they could be transferred to any parish. This to a large extent has led to the church been seeing at every nook and cranny of every town in Nigeria. Many progress, successes and challenges must have been recorded in the course of doing this, but then there are some issues, as regard this, that call for immediate attention. These will be addressed in the paper and possible recommendations given.

What is Church Planting?

Church planting is that ministry which through evangelism and discipleship establishes and reproducing kingdom communities of believers in Jesus Christ who are committed to fulfilling biblical purposes under local spiritual leaders. It can also be defined as the practice of establishing a core of Christian worshippers in a parish, with the intention that they should develop into a thriving congregation (Wagner 1990, p.11).

Models of church planting

There are several different models of church planting namely:

- Parachute or parachute drop method. In this method, a church planter and family move into a new location to start a church from scratch.
- Another method is for an existing church or church planting organization, known as the mother church, to provide the initial leadership and resources (money and/or people) to start a new, or daughter, church. This may also be done by a group of organizations working together.
- House or cell church method. Small groups, called cells, which meet in homes may form and multiply using a relational model (see house church). Some cell groups are networked with one another and periodically meet together in a larger group.
- A church may also be planted when an existing church splits.
- Finally, the expansion of a Multi-site church may result in new churches being established, however, this is not the same as church planting (Roozen&Hoge 1979)

Biblical Foundations for Church Planting

The phrase “church planting” is not found in the Bible, but it is used by Christians to describe the process found in the scriptures by which churches are started. However, it could be said that the church planting focus is biblical and this could be confirmed in the gospels and the ministry of Jesus and Paul. The term church planting has its origin in the writings of Paul, the first and arguably the most effective church planter of his time:

I planted the seed, Apollo watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plant nor the one who watered is anything but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who watered have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are God’s worker, you are God’s field, God’s building. (1 Cor. 3:57)

Also the bible confirmed that as the apostle Paul traveled through an area, he always tried to spend enough time in each city to establish a local body of believers and train the leadership (Acts 14: 12-23). Later, he would write or try to revisit those churches to confirm and encourage them in the faith (Acts 15: 41, 1Thessalonians 3:2). The churches he established would then begin to send out missionaries themselves, and so the work of church planting continued (1Thessalonians 1; 8). The love that Christ and the apostle had for church planting could be deduced from the passage of the scriptures below:

- Ephesians 1:3-14, 1 Peter 2:4-10 – Church planting is a central part of God’s mission to form a new people of God.
- Matthew 16:18 – Christ loves the church and promised to build it.
- 1 Corinthians 3:6, Acts 2:47 – God grows His church by adding those who are saved.
- God’s plan goes beyond rescuing the lost to transforming lives, families and communities (Parable of salt and light — Matthew 5:13-16; of yeast — Matthew 13:33; and ministry of Jesus and apostles).
- Matthew 28:18-20 – The Great Commission implicitly includes church planting (teaching, baptizing, discipling all nations).
- Luke 14:23, 15:1-10 – The task of evangelism is complete only when people are brought into the fold of the church.
- The book of Acts demonstrates that new churches are the normal and necessary result of evangelism and disciple-making.
- Romans 15:19-20, 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 – Church planting is central to Pauline understanding and practice of mission.
- Matthew 24:14 – Jesus will not return until there is a witness to every ethnic group. Meanwhile, if one were to look at the steps by which Paul planted churches; one would observe the following pattern:
 - He prayed, fasted and was guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 1-2, 4: 16:6, 9)
 - He was sent out by another group of believers (Acts 13:3)
 - He joined with other believers (formed teams) to start churches (Acts 13: 2; 15: 36- 16:3)
 - The team travels to a new area where Jesus was not known (Acts 13: 4, Romans 15: 20)
 - They travel to a new place to plant more churches (Acts 14: 1, 6,20)
 - They return to strengthen and encourage the disciples in each place (Acts 14: 22)ⁱ

The five key process of apostolic church planting identified are:

1. Prayer and building of an effective team
2. Evangelism
3. Discipleship
4. Training and releasing leaders
5. Watch and care, when the church planter periodically mentors the new leadership. (Craig, 2011, p 8)

Be that as it may, it could be said here that the present day church has enough justification to plant new churches. But then the question is: has the motive not been defeated? What is the vision of the Redeemed Christian Church of God? What do they want to achieve by so doing?, has there any improvement or growth in the newly established churches in the area under study?. All these questions will be addressed below.

Vision of the Redeemed Christian Church of God

But let's explore the RCCG G.O's vision and there we would see that one of the visions of the church is to plant churches so that for one, members of the churches will definitely enjoy the fact that they can go anywhere in Nigeria, and some parts of the world and still find branches. The vision is hereby stated below:

- To make heaven.
- To take as many people with us.
- To have a member of RCCG in every family of all nations.
- To accomplish No. 1 above, holiness will be our lifestyle.
- To accomplish No. 2 and 3 above, we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance.
- In every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries (The Redeemed Christian Church of God Manual, 2010, p 4).

These objectives the church is set to pursue until every Nation in the world is reached for the Lord Jesus Christ. Between last year's convention and this year, a total of 1,144 parishes were planted in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG, making the church unarguably the fastest growing Pentecostal Church in the world. In order to fill the yawning gap created by the increasingly rapid growth, the leadership of the church has perfected plans to create 20 new provinces across the globe at the end of the last year convention and this is being accomplished gradually as some were created in this year convention.

Pastor Enoch A. Adeboye's plan to have more Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) branches is getting a lot of reactions due to the attendant challenges normally faced by the young parishes particularly those in the rural areas. The latest is from the lawyer and human rights activist, Femi Falana who advises the General Overseer (worldwide) to focus on winning more souls for Christ instead of planting churches everywhere. He further says, Pastor Adeboye's

vision may not be the best as he will only succeed in creating business centers, not churches. In the same vein, Anthony Cardinal Okogie, Emeritus of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos shares the same view as the Lawyer and disagreed with Pastor Adeboye's vision and decision to planting churches everywhere. He says, it is a lot to manage 20 branches effectively as opposed to 200. As the number of branches increases, it becomes more difficult to ensure that things are still being done right and that the church is still one. Also, more branches mean having to delegate more; meaning Pastor Adeboye, the G.O, will have to appoint and rely on more heads, which could bring their own agendas. This could eventually lead to divisions in the church, so having too many branches is not the best thing (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/rccg-plants-1000-parishes-in-one-year/> But the fact remains that the believe of the General Overseer is that: for one, members of the churches will definitely enjoy the fact that they can go anywhere in Nigeria, and some parts of the world and still find branches. Who wouldn't want that? Secondly, more branches mean more Christians in the world, which should mean more souls for Christ, right? So, it's a win-win <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/rccg-plants-1000-parishes-in-one-year/> On the other hand, we cannot deny that having too many branches could affect the church negatively. Despite this potential negative outcome, we still have to say that the G.O's vision is not completely bad. It does hold some merit after all. The population is increasing on daily basis and so there is need to reach out to more people. But then even where the church has more parishes, new ones are coming up thereby leading to contestation of space. In view of this, attention will now be focused on the pattern of church planting in Ekiti and the attendant challenges.

Process of Church Planting in Ekiti Province of RCCG

Following the vision of the General Overseer, new parishes are usually planted in April and December "let's go-a-fishing programme". In most cases, Zonal and Area headquarters are always saddled with these processing responsibilities which include:

1. Getting location or space possibly new area or five minutes' walk to the already existing parish in existence. That is, it doesn't matter whether a particular parish of RCCG is around the newly acquired space or location gotten. It could be a rented apartment, uncompleted building or inside primary or secondary schools.
2. Sourcing for funds for the programme to be done in that location and take-off fund for the new parish. At times, the provincial headquarter could be of assistance depending on how buoyant they are or the workers in existing area. Zonal or parishes would be asked to contribute.
3. After the expiration of the let-us-go-a-fishing, a minister and a group of brethren will be appointed to pioneer the new parish. Most time, the workers that would start the new parish may be a family and just two workers.
4. In the subsequent years, if the new parish is making use of a rented apartment, the pastor and the few people with him would be the ones to source for fund, buying properties and erecting new building and other expenses that might be incurred.
5. The responsibility of looking for a permanent site is solely on the new parish in addition with the project of building the structure. (The researcher is worker in the Church and this makes it possible for to know what obtains in the system.)

Statistical Data Showing the Number of Parishes in Ekiti Provinces of the Redeemed Christian Church of God

	PROVINCE1	PROVINCE2	PROVINCE3	PROVINCE4	PROVINCE5
NO OF PARISHES	119	341	215	127	140

**SOURCE: rccg.org/rccg-parishes retrieved 25th August, 2018
Total Number of Parishes is 942 as at 25th August, 2018.**

From the foregoing it could be said that the church is one of the fastest growing church in Ekiti and from the information gathered two new additional provinces was created in this year convention making a total number of seven (7) provinces in Ekiti alone. The immediate implication of this is that some parishes will come under the new provinces and new` parishes will be established again in addition to the existing ones. The new provinces too would need to grow like their counterparts. That is not to say that the existing provinces would not established new parishes come December and April let`s-go-a-fishing. This becomes imperative in order to fulfill the vision of the church of having RCCG at every five minutes driving distance. But then this giant stride, good as it is, has its own attendant challenges. In fact, some members, having noticed the inherent challenges, have been suggesting that it is better to consolidate the existing parishes at least for the next five years so that by then, they must have acquired their own properties and possibly have good number of congregation. A good number of the new parishes do not have their own structure in place. Some are making use of car garage and with few members. There is contestation for space and souls within the same church and it is one of the criteria for promotion for the pastors in charge, that is, the number of parishes that the overall leader is able to plant will determine the promotion to the next level. Little or no concern is paid to the genuine salvation of the members.

Meanwhile, while some are considering not planting new churches for now, some still felt the church should still continue as many still need to be saved and equally be a member of the church. Be that as it may, this will lead one to take a cursory look at the benefits and attendant challenges of church planting in RCCG in Ekiti. In order to determine this, an opinion poll was sampled among the members and non-members of the church and the following was derived from the discussion.

Benefits of Church Planting in RCCG

It is established that new churches are generally better than established churches at evangelism for certain reasons:

1. A newly planted church is usually more focused upon reaching the lost than established churches, because they feel few and the most urgent task is obviously evangelism. Members of the planting group often volunteer, or are selected, because they have gifts and passion for evangelism and can tolerate their own needs being neglected for a while.
2. New parish gives room for mission-training context than a more comfortable established church context. There is always increased spiritual growth as they have to develop a clear understanding of the urgent need for the gospel, a prayerful dependence upon God; a

sacrificial commitment to the church and a lively awareness of being part of God's kingdom. Planted churches can adapt their culture to be more attractive to the community that the church hopes to reach (Mckainney, 1983, pp. 51-56).

3. A new parish has the ability of reaching new residents of a community. They easily get adapted to people from different socio-economic backgrounds.
4. Newcomers often feel more welcome in a new planted church than trying to join a church with long-established traditions. The sums of people reached by lots of smaller effective churches are usually greater than larger churches, and some people prefer the intimacy of a smaller church.
5. New churches as noted by one of the informants tend to have evangelistic energy. They usually have a period at their inception in which everyone involved understand the mission of the church and is committed to their role in it. In a church plant, there are no established patterns that control energetic and creative outreach (Jannecone, 1994, p 118).
6. New Church plant tends to produce new leaders such as elders, deacons and staff who may not have risen to each position in the mother church. Church planting provides new opportunities for men and women to step up and lead God's people (Mckinley, <https://www.marks.org> 10/27/2011)

Challenges Confronting the Church as Gathered from the Survey:

Establishing a new parish usually begins with great intentions, however as noted by an informant of the church chosen as case study for this work, the unique opportunities associated with new parishes are with certain challenges and this will be discussed below:

1. It was observed that the challenge of planting new parish result in discouragement and loneliness. The leader of the parish and the family are said to be vulnerable to discouragement and loneliness especially when members are very few.
2. Planting new parishes takes financial commitment or responsibilities. Having enough financial resources to start is critical. The studies show the average new church has about 10-15 people the first year, placing a huge financial strain on the workers. When dealing with the type of church plant we are discussing here, this is a major challenge. The established church or the headquarter not being a strategic partner in terms of given financial assistance. It is recorded that they are not having full support for budget and after six months they must remit certain percentage to the headquarter. This is a serious challenge because it means indirectly forcing members to give especially those who are not accustomed to giving yet (Gray 2007, p 23).
3. Most parishes are not planted where there is a great need for them and this result in poor attendance being recorded on Sunday services and even during weekly programme. According to Stephen Gray, Church planting, so to say, is a new adventure full of excitement and potential doom... they need to have nerves of steel and thick skin (Gray 1991, p 5). Planting can be lonely and messy when one does not have enough patience.
4. More established churches are slower in vetting potential leaders before delegating responsibilities; hence, some newly established parishes lack strong leadership team, leader and even elderly team, or other structures early in the church's life. Thus, they can lack an accountability team for the first few years. This can result in an increased burden of

responsibility, a lack of ongoing encouragement, no one to "watch their back," a lack of advice on key decisions, and a lack of peer fellowship.

5. Stunted growth is experienced in some newly established parishes. Some pastors that are chosen to lead the parish are not qualified for the assignment. They are just chosen based on their activities in the church and not the spiritual charisma; they lacked the ability to coordinate the newly established parish. Such a pastor in some cases will lack the skill to implement a process of leadership development.

Issues for Considerations In Spite of the Challenges

Church planting is in vogue today and that is a trend that is welcoming. However, it may be necessary that churches who cannot but plant new parishes should try to invest their time and resources in revitalizing these existing congregations. It is necessary that as churches are planning to reach out to the unreached, through planting of new parishes, bear the following in mind, as suggested by Mike Ruhl:

- Clarity of ministry philosophy (vision, mission, values, leadership culture);
- Solid team of leaders committed to the cause.
- Fundraising support for the planter's family in place
- Non-negotiable priorities in the core key areas such as discipleship, evangelism, leadership development, and planning.
- Church planting mentors and coaches who speak into the planter's life on a regular basis are important.
- Discerning the painfully difficult decision between quitting or persevering with the plant during critical times.
- Accountability through networking is vital to address every issue planters face (Mike 2006, np)

CONCLUSION:

As church planting is a necessity, there is need for churches to live in the assurance of fulfilling the mandate of Christ which is evangelization and the quest for peace and justice in the world. Any discussion on church planting assumes a passion for the lost souls. However, the motive of the church planters should be attitude that has compassion for the multitudes. The stimulation for planting should be to feel what Jesus feels... the pangs of the hungry, the alienation of the poor, the indignities of the wretched of the earth, and not to be a leader who plant new parishes because of personal gain alone. Jesus, on the contrary said that in his community, those aspiring after greatness must become servants, that is, the leader to serve. We could have enormous influence on the society not in terms of number of churches we have alone but in terms of quality. Any leader must learn to balance qualitative growth with quantitative growth. As the individual is nurtured, disciple and empowered to evangelize, they bring in more people for the purpose of expansion and growth in numbers. Lastly, church planting becomes beneficial and rewarding if attention can be given to the following follow-up questions: Where is the strategic location that could earn the body of Christ qualitative growth? What kind of leaders and people are we committing the task into their hands? To what extent are they equipped and trained for the

task ahead? Is there available the required resources and is Christ's intention of setting an example for the communities being taken into consideration? In summary, the church should do the needful to remain faithful to the vision and work towards breaking new grounds rather than unhealthy rivalry in the Christendom.

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