



Relationship Between Communication And Church Growth

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ABSTRACT

Every church wants to grow. Every church wants a healthy congregation growth. Church growth is classified into two types: number and quality. Quantitative growth refers to a significant increase in church membership. Quality growth is characterized by the number of church members who are spiritually mature enough to want to be served as well as serve. The early church grew rapidly. The early church grew numerically as fresh souls joined the Christian fellowship. Moreover, the Early Church had qualitative growth, with every member actively participating in church activities. What prompted the early church's explosive growth? It was communication. The Early Church had good communication among its members. As a result, the Early Church grew in both quantity and quality. This paper will discuss the importance of communication in church growth. This discussion is based on Acts 2:41-47. This article will help church leaders to look inside their churches and learn from the early church about healthy communication within the church, with the anticipation that the experiences of Early Church might be experienced again by churches today.

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INTRODUCTION

Church growth is impossible to achieve without the church's own efforts. Churches make numerous initiatives to expand their congregations. Starting with organizing revival services and inviting charismatic pastors, Bible studies are conducted by utilizing materials written by experts from within and outside the country who specialize in church expansion [1].

Every church wishes for its membership to grow. Every church wishes for its congregation to expand in a healthy way. Church growth can be divided into two categories: quantity growth and quality growth. A considerable increase in the number of church members characterizes quantitative growth. As for quality growth, it is defined by the number of church members who have reached a level of spiritual maturity whereby they not only want to be served but also want to serve [2].

All the efforts above are very positive and needed to be done. However, the outcomes proved that the results were less than optimal [3]. Many churches that have spent large sums of money to execute the aforementioned things to expand their congregations have not experienced any church membership development in terms of quantity or quality. What is the problem here? It turns out that there is a vital element that the church is either lacking or is not developed for its growth. This element is communication. Communication is a significant element and is imperatively needed in the growth of the church. Without healthy communication within the church, all the efforts taken to grow the church will be in vain.

The Early Church was a church that experienced phenomenal growth. The Early Church experienced a quantitative growth with the addition of new souls who came into the church fellowship. Apart from that, the early church also experienced quality growth whereby every member of the congregation was actively involved in church activities. What helped the Early Church to experience such tremendous growth? It was communication. The Early Church was able to develop healthy communication among its congregation members. As a result, the Early Church experienced spectacular growth and development, both in quantity and quality [4].

This paper will focus specifically on the topic of communication and its benefits for church growth. This discussion is based on the life of the Early Church recorded in Acts 2:41-47. It is hoped that this article will provide enlightenment for church leaders to look into their churches and try to learn from the Early Church in creating healthy communication within the church, so that what was experienced by the Early Church can potentially be experienced by the churches today.

METHODOLOGY

This is a documentary study that is focused on systematic review and examination whereby published primary sources are contained in different collections, libraries, and record centers. The Bibliography explores these sources and archival collections.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are many definitions of the word communication described in dictionaries. From the existing definitions, it can be concluded that communication is an activity or process of giving information to other people or to other living things [5]. Apart from that, communication can also mean the systems and processes used to communicate certain information [6].

Types of Communications

There are two types of communication, namely verbal communication and non-verbal communication. In verbal communication, communication is conducted using words, whether written or spoken. While in non-verbal communication, communication is expressed using everything else but words, such as facial expressions, touch, physical appearance, artifacts, environmental factors, personal space, time, vocal aspects of language and silence [7].

Humans are social beings. They live and associate with other humans, and communication is needed to facilitate the interaction. In the prehistoric time, human beings talked to each other to work together, exchange information, improve their tools, amaze people of interest, and warn people of danger [8]. Poe mentioned that as people started to grow their family, children then were exposed to communicate for the aforementioned reasons, which led to the 'Talking Culture' in the Talking Era (180,000 BCE – 3500 BCE). Besides gestures, talking was the only means of communication [8]. Over the course of human existence, the world has witnessed the shift of different times of communication from the Talking Era to Manuscript Era (3500 BCE), Print Era (1450 – 1850), Audio Visual Era (1850 – 1950), and the Internet Era (1990 – present time) [8].

Regardless of the different eras that comes with unique channels and concentration of communication, communication is proven to be vital whether in the nucleus family to big communities. With communication, a person can convey what he or she feels, thinks, wants, and expects to others. Thus, other people will know what a person feels, thinks, wants and expects, and concurrently, gives the reaction needed to respond to all of it [9]. This kind of interaction is very much needed in human life to create connection and unity in a flawed world. This communication process is called interpersonal communication, defined as "...a selective, systemic process that allows people to reflect and build personal knowledge of one another and create shared meanings" [7]. This type of communication is further supported that interpersonal communications involves "...communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another" (University of Minnesota, 2016). This only ascertains that interpersonal communication describes how human beings need each other as they are interdependent to one another. People's mutual experiences will aid them to connect to one another, thus strengthening relationships.

Sensitivity, openness, acceptance, and trust are among the characteristics of healthy interpersonal communication [7]. As a result, healthy interpersonal communication must be created in all aspects of human life, at all times and in all places. At home, at school, at work, in the community, and especially in the church, healthy communication must be cultivated. A healthy church is a growing church, and a healthy church will expand if the members communicate effectively.

Communications Benefit

The presence of healthy communication in the church will enable the congregation to achieve and accomplish many things [5], as well as to feel at ease and accepted in the church. The church will be productive because of the formation of communication inside the church, as the congregation will be motivated to focus on the church's vision and mission. Apart from that, every church member would enjoy being in God's house and experience feeling at home. This happened in the Early Church, when everyone in the congregation felt joy and serenity when they gathered in God's house [10].

Quarrels and conflicts may arise when there is a lack of healthy communication in the church. Disputes and quarrels will consume a lot of time and energy. These unfortunate outcomes will only yield more work to the church, when, these disagreements and misunderstandings could have been lessened. If such unnecessary situations occur, the church will be unable to expand and develop because the congregation are preoccupied clashing with each other when they should be taking care of relevant matters that support the mission of the church.

Aside from that, if the church is rife with quarrels, the congregation will lack joy. The members will possibly feel uneasy about continuing to stay in such a toxic environment. Many members of the congregation might be inclined to abandon the church. This sad consequence is detrimental to the health of congregational growth. Every church hopes that

each church member will experience the church as a home away from home. This can be achieved if our church practices good communication.

Interpersonal Closeness

Healthy communication will also create interpersonal closeness in a church [11]. Interpersonal closeness in a church is needed for the growth and development of the church. The closeness between the servant of God and the congregation, and between the church members themselves will have a significant impact on the growth and development of the church as experienced by the Early Church [12].

Today, the problems faced by the congregation are increasingly complex and complicated, including family problems, economics, studies, work, and others [11]. Many congregations are unable to deal with problems on their own. They need other people to be friends to share their struggles with [13]. The interdependent relationship signifies the role of communication. With healthy communication, it will create closeness between individuals in the congregation. With closeness, the congregation will dare to openly share their sorrows and joys with others in the church. With this way, the congregation will know the struggles faced by each other. After knowing the struggles and difficulties of each other, the congregation has concern for the difficulties of others and are moved to have compassion for one another. Here begins the manifestation of willingness to provide assistance, through verbal and non-verbal ways, that are needed by others.

The church must be different from the world. We live in a post-modern era in which humans live full of egoism. People tend to pay attention to their own interests without caring about others. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting pressed and marginalized. As a result, there is a large and deep gap created between the rich and the poor.

The church today must learn from the Early Church who practiced love in a world that had lost love. The Early Church congregation lived a life of sharing and caring for one another, and with that mutual love, there were no cheating between the members. As a result, the Early Church was liked by many people, so many people were interested in joining the Early Church [5]. Closeness in relationships followed by concern for others, will be created if there is healthy communication in the church.

Creating Bigger Influence

Communication is also able to influence other people [3]. The influence referred here is addressing the good and positive influence for others. In this paper, influence has two meanings. The first is the ability to influence someone to desire him or herself to involve themselves in the ministry of the church. According to Mastroianni, communication is an ability that makes other people take part [10]. In other words, healthy communication will be able to move and encourage someone to be actively involved in an activity not by compulsion, but with sincerity.

The church will be able to develop and grow if the entire congregation has the desire to be actively involved in church services. Without the involvement of church members, it is impossible for the growth and development of the church to occur. Today, many churches are having difficulty finding and involving members of their congregations in church services, such as being on the board, commissioners, and other activists [5]. As a result, only certain people are involved in church ministry. As a result, the service will not be effective. To be able to influence the congregation to sincerely wanting to be involved in the ministry, it is necessary to have healthy communication within the church.

This was clearly the experience in the Early Church. With healthy communication among church members, all the congregations in the Early Church agreed to be actively involved in church activities. Apart from that, they also served voluntarily with much pleasure. They felt joy serving God's work in the church. As a result, the development and growth of the Early Church was inevitable [3].

The second influence is the ability to change people to do more positive things. In this world, no one is perfect. Every person has flaws and weaknesses. It is the same in the church. The church is made up of sinners. Therefore, in the church, there will be people who have problems and who will create problems. People like this should not be allowed because it will disrupt the order of life in the church. Such people should not be shunned or even antagonized. They are our brothers and sisters who need to be helped because they cannot help themselves. We must help people like this to experience positive change.

To change the troubled people in the church is not easy. The church needs to be careful with such delicate people. To change troubled people, we cannot use a repressive and reactive approach. Doing so will only make their condition worse. In fact, such negative approach will lead to high resistance from them. As a result, they will not change in a positive direction but on the contrary, will be pursue a more negative direction.

To help people who have problems in the church, there is a great need to use a healthy communication approach.

Through healthy communication, the troubled person will feel close to the people in the church. With interpersonal communication, this person will feel that he or she is cared for and is understood by the people in the church. As a result, people with problems will open themselves up to input and counsel from church members about their weaknesses and shortcomings. Then, people with problems may experience positive changes. Experience and facts prove that people who are changed in a positive direction will be a great force for the growth of the church [14].

Respecting One Another

Healthy communication turns out to be able to create a life of mutual respect for one another. One of the basic human needs is the need to be respected and to respect [15]. Disputes and fights that lead to destruction are often triggered by an attitude of disrespect.

Many families are torn apart because their members do not have the ability to value and respect each other. Husbands disrespect their wives, and wives disrespect their husbands. Parents do not respect children, and children do not respect parents. As a result, the family will no longer have harmony. What could possibly appear is hatred. If hatred is allowed, it would be a matter of time whereby it will explode and destroy the unity of a family.

This is the same case with the life of the church. If every member of the church does not develop an attitude of mutual respect and honor, then destruction is foreseen to occur. Today, many churches are broken up because there is not a life of mutual respect in them. For example, the servant of God does not respect the congregation, and the congregation does not respect the servant of God. The result may be anger and hatred within the church. If this negative cycle of disrespectfulness is allowed to drag on, it will destroy the integrity of a church.

We must do everything we can to prevent this negative situation from happening to our churches. Therefore, we need to learn like the Early Church where the congregation respects one another. They eat together and have fellowship in the homes of the congregation, and they take turns in doing so [16]. Through this action, it shows that the Early Church did not discriminate against each other for class, race, ethnicity, education level, social level, economic level, etc. They all felt equal and equal. No one felt superior to the other. On the other hand, no one perceived inferior to the other. The early congregation was able to accept the strengths and weaknesses of each other. As a result, in the Early Church, there was an intimacy that did not pass quickly. In the church, a very strong and immovable unity is created.

This must be the desire of the churches today. Churches at the present time must cultivate and develop an attitude of mutual respect. The church can grow, develop and serve one another with love if there is healthy communication in the church.

Conflict-Friendly

Healthy communication can make a person feel comfortable with conflict [17]. Conflict is something that constantly exists as long as there is life. Conflict can happen anytime and anywhere. Conflicts can occur at home, in the office, in the community, in government, even in the church. Conflict is not to be feared and avoided. Conflict must be faced and overcome. Many people try to deal with conflict by running away from the conflict or letting the conflict float. As a result, the conflict did not end, but only got worse.

Conflict does not need to be taken aggressively. The more aggressive we face the conflict, the more serious the conflict will be. Confronting the conflict in an aggressive manner will only make it more difficult to resolve. On the contrary, conflicts need to be dealt calmly. When we are calm when dealing with conflicts, the problems will be easier to overcome. It is common that people submerged themselves in conflict, to the point that conflict becomes overwhelming. We should walk above the conflict so that we are in control of the conflict. The key point is one must feel comfortable with conflict, and to avoid panic when facing a conflict. Panic will exacerbate the conflict.

The experience of feeling calm in dealing with conflict will only occur when a person has healthy communication with others. With healthy communication, a person will be able to resolve conflicts that occur with other people, no matter how complicated it is. With healthy communication will create openness between those who are involved in the conflict.

The members of the Early Church developed an attitude of mutual openness between them. They always spoke from the heart when things bothered their relationship. When someone speaks, the others want to listen with their hearts what the other person has to say [18]. With openness, the cause of the conflict will be revealed. Knowing the cause will make it easier to resolve the conflict. On the other hand, if there is no openness, the conflict will be more difficult to resolve.

Today, many churches are full of unresolved conflicts. These conflicts continue to live in the church members' personal lives because there is no openness among church members. They are afraid to share a conflict that interferes

with, disturbs, and damages their relationships with other people. As a result, the conflict will be protracted and eventually, disrupt the life of the church. Therefore, every member of the church needs to be open to one another. This can be realized if there is healthy communication within the church.

CONCLUSION

Communication is necessary for the church's life to flourish for a variety of reasons, including the fact that it keeps the church alive, makes the church experience more familiar, makes the church more productive, makes the church more comfortable, makes the church stronger, makes the church healthier, and helps the church grow.

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