

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TO INCREASE WEEKLY ATTENDANCE MEETINGS IN DOUALA III DISTRICT, WEST CAMEROON MISSION.

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The decline in church attendance during weekly meetings in Douala III district is alarming. Some observers after reflection before conducting the project have gone to the extent of shutting the doors on Wednesday and Friday based on the fact of the lost of interest of some members towards those services.

In the selected churches where the problem was at stake, out of a total of 100 members only 15 to 20 were regular to weekly meetings, making an average of 20%. In the case of CCC/SOCARTO church, out of a total of 90 members only 40 were regularly attending such meetings, making a rate of 45%. At the end of the research, BEEDI saw the number of members attending weekly arose to 55% and in CCC/SOCARTO from 45% to 75%. The surveys indicate that some were not coming because of lack of sound and good programs, the church was engaged in monotony and routines, and no time was allotted for prayers, testimonies, and praises.

The evaluation indicates that if members are constantly well thought, educated, and trained and if the service is conducted in a relevant way so as to meet the needs of

the brethren, the number of attendances will increase and the members more devoted to one another and committed to the Lord.

The study was concluded by making some relevant recommendations both to the selected churches and the mission administration. In the world of constant changes and confronted to social and human crises, the church programs need to be adjusted to fit the interest of people that lead them to salvation.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

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by

Jean Clovis SOUM

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To my beloved wife

Marguerite Soum

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Designing a strategy in order to increase members' attendance to Wednesday and Friday meetings in Douala III district is the main reason for the program in which this research is embarked on and purposely oriented to carry out a continuing and permanent solution to the members' attendance to weekly meetings.

What is needed to be done is to raise as much as possible, the percentage of those who for one reason or another, restrain themselves from attending weekly meetings. By so doing, the church will grow both in quantity and in quality, and this will help the new converts and the old members to be alive and improve the faith and their relationship with the Lord who has called them from darkness to light, to his church. Despite the fact that the idea of increasing the attendance of members in weekly meetings is at stake, a kind of inertia and negligence has been observed almost at every level, as far as the West Cameroon Mission is concerned. The negligence hinders practical and lasting solutions, and the pace of increase has remained low, and even worsens the percentage of attending weekly meetings.¹

¹ Rapport des activités du secrétariat de l'Eglise de CCC/SOCARTO.

Problem of the Study

Most Seventh-day Adventists in the Central Africa Union Mission in general, and in the West Cameroon Mission complain of the low attendance in weekly meetings by the members. If nothing is done, a time may come where churches may run their programs with a handful of members on Wednesday and Friday as it is the case now, or definitely close and only open the doors on Sabbaths.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research will consist of developing, creating, applying and evaluating a convenient and consistent strategy to increase church members' attendance to weekly meetings in Douala III district. This will not only reduce the percentage of the absentees but be a booster to church growth and its expansion.

Significance of the Study

Through this project, the researcher will both develop a strategy assignment and at the same time attempt to help Douala III district in its plans and objectives to find a continuing and lasting solutions to increase the percentage of members on weekly meetings, and reflect the image of the church where members achieve their goals of remaining firm in the faith.

The other aim of this research is to help the administrators of the West Cameroon Mission, the church leaders and the pastors in their different levels to conduct the suggested strategy. The research will also create venue where at every weekly meeting, the members will enjoy a close and trustworthy communion and fellowship, and share their personal and corporate burdens. The implementation of such

a strategy where the church members are involved in their spiritual and material welfare will easily take off the Douala III district in a state of self-sufficiency.

Limitations of the Study

Although there are many books on church nurture and care, the availability of means (being self-sponsored), times and people involved will not allow me to fully develop, elaborate and expand the concept of increasing attendances of members on weekly meetings. Nevertheless, this will not in no means lessen the value of this research based on experiences and views received from the field.

Delimitations of the Study

Despite the fact that the phenomenon is observed all over the West Cameroon Mission field, the research is confined within the Douala III district. Also within the district, the research is limited at the level of two churches where the issue of weekly attendance is at stake, these churches are BEEDI and CCC and they constitute my main area of interest.

Methodology of the Study

The first step of this research will consist of an analysis of the biblical exegesis and library research on church nurture strategies and parallel them with figures, in terms of attendances and membership from church records. This step will allow us to address and evaluate the problem of church attendances. The second step will help out to study and compare the percentages of church attendances at weekly church meetings. This will enable us to conduct interviews and surveys on church leaders and members to find out the reasons of the non-attendance on weekly meetings. The fourth step will encompass the critical analysis of the information gathered from the field and design a

strategy where by both the church leaders and the members of the selected churches will be thought and trained on the importance of attending weekly meetings, its relevancy and the implementation of the concept of church meetings. The last step of the research will be focused on the suggestions and solutions on church attendances.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The issue of increasing weekly attendance meetings is challenging. It is not peculiar to Douala III district, or to the West Cameroon Mission. The phenomenon is worldwide, and because of the lack and deficiency of a strategy, the problem will end up being stationary. The issue of church attendance on weekly meetings deserves an explanation. It is very easy to see after an evangelistic effort how happily people join the church, with the vow to support physically and spiritually the church, but quickly abstain from accomplishing their vows. This issue deserves explanations and findings.

When we read the Bible, we can find instances where such problems were raised and how they were solved. The Bible is therefore considered as the resourceful tool to be used regarding the strategy to increase weekly attendance meetings. The methodology will consist of:

1. Providing biblical foundation as basic statements.
2. Showing the impact of church meetings attendance.
3. Bringing details on church attendance.

There are a great numbers of passages from the Bible that describe the issue of church attendance in such a way that members will find in the church a place for fellowship and love. In Hebrews 10:25, we are encouraged and admonished not to forsake the church meetings – private or public worship- in order to remain firm in our profession of faith. In other words, the text focuses on apostasy and as such, serves as an illustration of apostasy. From the account of Luke regarding the apostolic church in Acts 2:46, the members are encouraged to attend all church meetings. These church

meetings can be termed as weekly meetings in accordance with the subject of this research. These meetings are not to be looked as a burden, but as a response to the Lord's gift of salvation. Therefore Hebrews10:25 and Acts 2:46 constitute the Bible foundation of this research.

The New American Standard Bible (NAS) puts Hebrews10:25 this way: "Not forsaking our own assembling of ourselves together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another." In this verse, the apostle exhorts believers to hold fast the profession of faith. In the course of the elaboration of the research, a special care will be given on some words or sentences regarded as key words such as: "not forsaking", "assembling together," "the habit of some," and encouraging one another,"

The second text which serves as basic statement of the research is Acts2:46. The King James Version (KJV) renders it as: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat meat with gladness and singleness of heart". In parallel with the issue of church attendance on Wednesday and Friday meetings and the implication therein, the emphasis will be placed on some key words such as: "continuing daily", "one accord in the temple", "breaking bread", "with gladness and singleness of heart". All these implications working together will help to establish the value of the evidence therein in relationship with the research.

The Issue of Heb10:25

Commenting on this verse, Clarke¹ declares:

Whether this means public or private worship is hard to say; but the word is but once more used in the NT, (2Thessalonians2:1), and there means the gathering together of the redeemed of the Lord at the day of judgment, it is as likely that it means here private religious meetings, for the purpose of mutual exhortation: and this sense appears the more natural here, because it is evident that the church was now in a state of persecution, and therefore their meetings were not

¹ Adam Clarke, in Phil Lindner, *Power Bible CD*, Logos Library System, 2006.

probably held in private. For fear of persecution, it seems as if some had deserted these meetings...as the custom of certain person is. They had given up these strengthening and instructive means, and the others were in danger of following their examples.

In parallel with Clarke, Barnes expands more in the analysis of this verse.

According to Barnes the gathering was for the purpose of worship. Some expositors have understood the word rendered here as “assembling” as meaning “the society of Christians”, or the church and they have supposed that the object of the apostle here is to exhort them, not to apostatize from the church².

The command, then, here is, to meet together for the worship of God, and it is enjoined on Christians as an important duty to do it. It implies also that there is blame and fault where this is “neglected”.

“*As the manner of some*” is, why those here referred to neglected public worship is not specified. It may have been from such causes as the following:

1. Some have been deterred by the fear of persecution, as those who were thus assembled would be more exposed to danger than others.
2. Some may have neglected the duty because they felt no interest in it – as professing Christians now sometimes do.
3. It is possible that some may have had doubts about the necessity and propriety of this duty and on that account may have neglected it.
4. Or it may perhaps have been, though we can hardly suppose that this reason existed, that some have neglected it from a cause which now sometimes operates from dissatisfaction with a preacher, or with some member or members of the church, or with some measure in the church.³

Barnes continues by saying that:

Whatever were the reasons, the apostle says that they should not be allowed to separate, but that Christians should regard it as a sacred duty to meet together for the worship of God. With all who bears the Christian name, with all who expect to make advances in piety and religious knowledge, it should be regarded as a sacred duty to assemble and invigorated by waiting together on the Lord. There

² Ibid.

³ Albert Barnes, *Commentary*, in Phil Linder, *Power Bible CD*, Logos Library System, 2006.

is an obvious propriety that people should assemble together for the worship of the Most High, and no Christian can hope that his graces will grow, or that he can perform his duty to his Maker, without uniting thus with those who love the service of God.⁴

“Encouraging one another” is the purpose of gathering together in assembling.

Exposing on this issue, Barnes⁵ says that in assembling together a direction which proves that it is proper for Christians to encourage one another when they are gathered together for public worship – or **private worship**- (emphasis added). It is indeed a reason to believe that the preaching in the early Christian assemblies partook much of the character of mutual exhortation.

As a result of the analysis of this verse, the apostle urges the believers to remain firm in their profession of faith, no matter the reason or excuses, the believer should continue in constant and infallible relationship with the Lord and with one another. Remaining firm in the faith is the constant challenge. If the members abstain from attending church meetings, this will gradually drift them from the faith and love for Christ. The preaching should be turning around a reminder to the believers during their assembling for a steadfast adherence to the truth, the duty and their vow. If this is well repeatedly done, the expected results from the members will be seen and felt, and this is part of exhortation from the church and should include one another.

A Look at the Implications of Acts 2:46

The King James Version renders it as “And they, continuing daily in one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The new believers were constant in their public devotions⁶. They were steadfastly attentive unto their faith and gave unremitting care to things pertaining to the church. They demonstrated perseverance, courage and readiness to obedience. Commenting on this issue, Matthew Henry⁷ starts by giving an overall view of the history of the truly apostolic church, of the first days of it, that is its state of infancy and the state of its greatest innocence.

1. They kept close to holy ordinances, and abounded in all instances of piety and devotion, for Christianity, admitted in the power of it, will dispose the soul to communion with God in all those ways wherein he has appointed us to meet him and promised to meet us.
2. They were diligent and constant in their attendance upon the preaching of the word. They continued in the apostle's doctrine, and never disowned nor dissented it; or, as it may be read, *they continued constant to the apostles' teaching or instruction, by baptism they were disciple to be taught, and they were willing to be taught.*
3. They had fellowship with one another in religious worship. They met in the temple: which was their place of meeting for joint fellowship with God is the best we can have with one another. 1John1:3 say: "we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ" (NIV).

⁶ Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol.6, 150.

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Bible Works*, 134.

Elaborating on the perspective, which is on the attendance of church meetings, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary comments on Acts 2:46, especially on some key words:

a. *They were daily in the temple*, not only on the days of the Sabbaths and solemn feasts, but on other days – ***Wednesday and Friday*** (emphasis supplied).

Worshipping God is to be our daily endeavor, and where there is opportunity, the oftener it is done publicly the better. God loves the gates of Zion, and so we must.

b. *They were with one accord*, not only no discord nor strife, but a great deal of holy love among them; and they heartily joined in their public services.

The contrast to the competitive spirit shown at the time of the Lord Supper (Luke22:24) and the calm and solemn joy that characterized the believers in this period of Christianity is well drawn at this level⁸

c. *With gladness and singleness*, the community rejoiced at the privilege of being Christians. Not only that the believers when gathered in assemblies, were singularized with their simplicity, humility, that is “free from stones”, with an unalloyed benevolence and generosity.⁹

From the analysis so far the reasons of choosing Acts2:46 and Hebrews10:25 are meaningful and symbolic. The believers were encouraged to worship God as a corporate body in the temple, in order to see what the Lord had promised to be fulfilled, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Also the reason being that Jesus will come soon according to the promised contained in Acts 1:11 and John 14:1-3. They were warned not to apostatize; instead they were called to stay together in an atmosphere of fellowship. They were called to be constant in a worship attitude towards the Lord. As

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

a result of their commitment with the Lord and the love of one another, Jesus wrought wonders in their midst, turning their thought to the certainty of His return.

The symbolic understanding of the church is underlined in the meaningful comprehension of the need for the believers to worship together, and avoid dispersion. From the beginning to the end the Bible is concerned with God's purpose of creating a people for Himself; this can be seen with the call of Noah, Abraham, the building of the temple, the exodus, etc. God was building a people who could respond to Him in faith and obedience and who will be a blessing for all peoples. The call of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was intended to fashion such a people (Genesis 17:1-8; cf. 12:1-3; 15:1-6). Likewise the call of Israel was founded. When Israel as a nation proved to be recalcitrant, seeking like Adam to be self-sufficient, God turned to the creation of a remnant (Isaiah 37:31; Micah 2:12; 5:7, 8; Zephaniah 3:13), through whom His purposed redemption would be fulfilled. The divine intent to create out of Israel God's people is a continued study in the New Testament, where it finds its fulfillment in the Christian church¹⁰.

¹⁰ Raoul Dederen, *Exposing on the Church, in Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist*, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association; *Theology* 12:539.

The Relevancy of Acts 2:46 and Hebrews 10:25 and the Project

The purpose of this part of the research is to suggest and design a strategy to increase weekly church members' attendance, no matter the reasons.

Acts 2:46 focus on those who, for their love to the Master and for the brotherly love, persevere in attending continually daily church meetings. As the result of that steadfast commitment, they experienced growth both in quantity and quality, and above all the fruits of the Spirit "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Raoul Dederen¹¹ expanding on the atmosphere that reigns within church members when they gather together suggests the following points:

- Faith: living faith - The church is a society not of thinkers or workers, but of believers; the church-building faith was not a mere act of intellectual assent, but the symbol of an intimate union between the believer and Christ, which resulted in a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Fellowship. This fellowship is primarily a fellowship with Christ, who, though having ascended to heaven (Acts 3:21), is still present to His disciples (Galatians 2:20). It is equally important; this fellowship is also actively exercised toward the members of the Christian community.
- Oneness. This does not occur as a result of a voluntary act of uniting on the part of the members of Christ's body, but a unity enabled by the spirit, for the church has found oneness in Christ (Ephesians 5:2-15).
- Holiness. The holiness or sainthood of the Christian community resides in its separation from the world in answer to God's call (2 Timothy 1:9).

¹¹ Ibid., 561-564.

- Universally. The church is meant to embrace all nations (Matthew 28:19; cf. Revelation 14:6). It is not bound to a particular time or place, but encompasses believers from all generation, nations, and cultures.
- Apostolicity. The church is grounded in the message of the apostles and the bible (Isaiah 8:20).

This new identity in Jesus demands that we build relationships across ethnic and cultural lines. And only the *agape* love of Jesus, implanted in our hearts, can bring about these relationships in this new community.

As Jurgen Moltmann wrote:

The church of the crucified Christ cannot consist of an assembly of like persons who mutually affirm each other, but must be constituted of unlike persons. For the crucified Christ, the principle of fellowship with those who are different, and solidarity with those who have become alien and have been made different. Its power is not friendship, the love for what is similar and beautiful (“*philia*”), but creative love for what is different, alien and ugly.¹²

This illustration confirms the biblical statement that God has made in the Old Testament: “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23, NIV).

Considering the statement in Hebrews 10:25, the emphasis is laid upon the believers who for one reason or the other have stopped attending church meetings, and whose behavior is contrary to God’s will. Relating to the topic, the verse says that church members should endeavor to meet together, and all attend church services – public or private- to strengthen each other and renew their faith and commitment to their Master.

¹² Jurgen Moltmann, *The crucified God: The cross of Christ as the foundation of criticism of Christian Theology*, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 28.

The Biblical Mandate Calls for Faithfulness, Commitment and Fellowship

The story of the prodigal son, the lost son and the running father, is recorded in Luke 15:11-32. In response to his demands, the father gave to his younger son his part of inheritance before his demise. The younger son, after wasting his fortune, suffered hunger during the famine period. He then repented and returned home, where the father organized a feast to celebrate his return. The older son refused to participate. Luke 15:17-20 narrates it this way:

When he came to his senses, he said “how many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men”. So he got up and went to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The older son, who was at work in the fields, heard the sound of celebration, and was told that his younger brother has returned. He was not impressed, and became angry: “The older brother became angry and refusing to go into the celebration hall. So his father went out and pleaded with him.” (v.28). The reasons why the younger son left the father’s house could be found in the following propositions:

1. Fear to be subjected to discipline; (2). Freedom of life ;(3). Pursuit of pleasure of life and conformity to the pattern of present life; (4). Decrease of love to the father and the household.

The text of Hebrews goes deeper and points out a particularity “as the manner of some”. The lost son falls in the track of believers who do not attend church services for some reasons: (a). some have fallen astray, what can be termed as lack of conversion. (b).Others are encouraged not to follow their example, rather bring them back to the fold. (c). Fan the flame till the fulfillment of the promise of the second coming of Jesus.

The call for steadfast and infallible faith to Jesus, the constant attendance on daily affairs related to the Father's house (the church) and the biblical mandate to love one another, to care for one another and share the inheritances of the father with "gladness" and "singleness of heart" should be a constant reminder whenever brethren meet for public worship (on Sabbaths) or for weekly meetings (Wednesdays and Fridays).

Nevertheless, the concern is still on how the mandate of a genuine fellowship and the concern for each other is presented and implemented both in the Scriptures and in the assemblies.

Our contemporary era is a constant and fateful witness of so many Seventh-day Adventists not attending weekly church meetings. At the beginning when they newly joined the church they were well involved, but later on they became totally indifferent and lukewarm from the initial love and interest to their profession of faith. In the context of this research which consists of designing a strategy to increase the attendance in weekly meetings, it rightly deserves some findings and investigation. Therefore, the next step of the study consists of finding a solution, a movement that will bring them back to the initial love and faith. After the bible analysis we will focus on what Ellen G. White says about the issue.

Ellen G. White

The starting point of our research is related to the symptoms, in other words what leads someone to disregard and feel no interest to attend weekly church meetings?

Ellen G. White says: "The work of apostasy begins in some secret rebellion of the heart against the requirements of God's law. Unholy desires, unlawful ambitions, are cherished and indulged, and unbelief and darkness separate the soul from God.... Those who listen to the suggestion of Satan, and swerve from their integrity begin the downward path, and some masterful temptation hastens them on in the way of apostasy, till their descent is marked and rapid. Sins that were once most

repugnant, become attractive, and are welcomed and practiced by those who have cast off the fear of God and their allegiance to his law.”¹³

A thorough analysis of this quotation indicates that apostasy is like a malignant tumor, invisible to human eye. Even the believer who is involved in the process of apostasy can rarely comprehend the outcome of that behavior. And if care is not taken, the consequence is that the apostasy will become totally uncontrollable, destroying the essence of faith, the fear of God. The same writer continues: “But the most pleasurable beginning in transgression will end in misery, degradation, and ruin.”¹⁴

In the light of the comment of Ellen White, we can well understand the starting point of the parable of the prodigal son. When sin is cherished, it ends up in misery and total ruin. This is the case of the lost son. At this level of apostasy, an external intervention, greater than our will is needed. The lost son *went back to his senses*. This mechanism is the action of the Holy Spirit.

Ellen White says:

Penances, mortifications of the flesh, constant confession of sin, without sincere repentance; fasts, festivals, and outward observances, unaccompanied by the devotion – all these are of no value whatever. The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient, He made a whole, efficacious offering to God; and human effort without the merit of Christ, is worthless.”¹⁵

The awareness of the state of apostasy, the conscience of mind is prompted by the Spirit. The Spirit helps the sinner to take conscience, and focus on the merits of Christ on the cross.

The same writer continues by saying:” Conversion is a change of heart, a turning from unrighteousness to righteousness. Relying upon the merits of Christ, exercising

¹³ Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, (Hagerstown; M.D, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1964), 254.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, Book 3), 191.

true faith in Him, the repentant sinner receives pardon for sin.”¹⁶ The same writer marvels at the work of the Spirit and concludes: “The Holy Spirit strives with every man.... No human reasoning of the most learned man can define the operations of the Holy Spirit upon human minds and characters, yet they can see the effects upon the life and actions.”¹⁷

After the elaboration in stages of what can make a believer to go astray, and the beginning of the reverse movement, let’s focus on the principles and purposes of church meetings, and especially weekly meetings.

Reasons for Joining a Church

In the continuation of the importance of church meeting attendance, Ellen White first clarifies the principles guiding the church in these terms: “

The church is a Christian society formed by the members composing it, that each member may enjoy the assistance of all the graces of the other members.... The church is united in the holy bonds of fellowship in order that each member may be benefited by the influence of the others.”¹⁸

The point here is that the church is considered to be a center where believers meet to share together and commune with God. The possibility is offered to everyone to persevere, no matter the difficulties. It is at this level that the biblical mandate for faithfulness, commitment and fellowship is fulfilled.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 20.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages II* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 15.

The Importance of Weekly Meetings

The decline of prayer meetings is alarming. The phenomenon deserves some investigations. Something should come out as lasting solution in order to stop the hemorrhage. It is appalling to observe the low proportion of those attending such meetings.

The importance of weekly meetings is of a great value to the believers who have a constant relationship with the Lord. The worthiness of such a fellowship with Jesus and with one another cannot be overlooked by church members.

The origin of prayer meetings goes back to the periods of great religious revivals, when the church was battling against corruption and paganism.

Ellen White says: “when the early church became corrupted by departing from the simplicity of the gospel and accepting heathen rites and customs, she lost the Spirit and the power of God; and in order to control the consciences of the people, she sought the support of the secular power.”¹⁹

Weekly meetings and in some cases prayers meetings became an integral part of religious services of almost all the denominations. In fact the weekly meetings were adopted to be a source of religious strength for the believers in order to withstand the assaults of apostasy. The meetings became a necessity. The same writer says:” A prayer meeting will always tell the true interest of the church members in spiritual and eternal things. The prayer meeting is as the pulse of the body; it denotes the true spiritual condition of the church.”²⁰

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Washington DC, Review and Herald, 190), 443.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 183.

A thorough analysis of this statement gives the importance of prayer meetings. They are the thermometer of the spiritual condition of the church both spiritually and physically. The believer who is committed to His Master will devote his/her time in attending such gatherings. Believers should give prayer meetings a higher priority. Ellen White sums it: “Many declare that it is certainly no harm to go to a concert and neglect the prayer meeting – *weekly meetings*, emphasis supplied- where God’s servants are to declare a message from heaven. It is safe for you to be just where Christ has said He would be. Those who appreciate the words of Christ will not turn aside from the prayer meeting or from the meeting where the Lord’s messenger has been sent to tell them concerning things of eternal interest.”²¹

Other Authors

We begin with Kevin Milfley and the magnificent seven.²² In the continuation of the analysis of the key points to reach and gain back those who show less interest in attending weekly church meetings, one will also carefully go through the approach suggested by Kevin Wilfrey, pastor of the Linwood Seventh-day Adventist Church, Spokane, Washington, United States. In his article, he suggests seven principles showing that an individual may be discouraged, for one reason or another, and lost interest in church attendance, and more specifically on weekly meetings.

Make your preaching biblical and relevant. He says:” At a time when Christian faith and values are under attack and been eroded, and when more are becoming unchurched, is it not the responsibility of the church, the believers, and the pastors to

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kevin Wilfley, *The Magnificent Seven: Principles to Reach the Unchurched, Ministry*, 18-20.

affirm and proclaim a message that the world looks for?” The point here is that the message should be relevant to the need of the people.

Be caring and authentic. This caring should not be limited only to the folks, but extend with the pastor.

Build a friendly and receptive church. The writer makes this principle as a catalyst to reach the “unchurched,” which is to influence their return to church and make it constant and stable. This point goes in parallel with Hebrews 10:25. Ellen White also supports this principle showing the influence one has on a visiting member during church services. She says:” The lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?”²³

A complete analysis of this thought underlines the importance of a friendly and receptive church where “sincere hearts, genuine smiles, joyful greetings, and willingness to show up and support others” are visible. Wilfley concludes this principle by saying: “with members like these, is it any wonder the church remains strong and influential?”

Cultivate creative and attractive church services. The writer to support this argument says: “much thought, prayer, planning, and preparation are essential to make a worship service creative and appealing.” This helps to avoid routine and make church service lively. Wilfley exposes some practical tools to enhance church services and make them more appealing such as: (a). simplify your liturgy by avoiding more details.

²³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Washington DC, Review and Herald, 1900, vol.3), 371.

(b). use art, meaning that the preacher should be acquainted with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). (c). incorporate music into your message. (d). use illustrations in your preaching. (e). encourage participation. (d). a concert now and then is another powerful element to incorporate into your worship schedule. (f). testimonies from the congregations, whether planned or spontaneous.

Prayer is still the key. In support to this point, Welfley says:” Prayer is essential to achieve a positive atmosphere in the church and bring people to a saving relationship with Jesus.”

Provide for recreation and friendship. Recreation or leisure activities should be included in church services.

Engage in spiritual conversation. Wilfley’s principles have dealt with both external and internal points and this converges to the same point: increase and maintain at a high proportion the attendance by members whenever called for church gathering.

Delbert W. Baker

On his article entitled “Fan the flame, he describes how to maintain revival and reformation.”²⁴ Baker insists on the fact that one should first be revived and reformed so as to really fulfill the biblical mandate of faithfulness to Christ and seeker of the lost. Commenting on Timothy1:6-8, he says to ‘fan the flame’ implies that one should ‘get close to the fire and this requires a ‘focused mind-set’. What does it take to ‘fan the flame’ and keep the spirit of revival and reformation strong? Baker suggests the following three levels of attainment:

²⁴ Delbert W. Baker, Fan the Flame: How to Maintain Revival and Reformation, *Ministry*, August 2011, 10-12.

Upward connection. He says “on our own, we are totally incapable of remaining faithful to anyone or anything, not even ourselves. The greatest gift each of us receives as new children in Christ is the abiding presence Christ sent to be among us, the Holy Spirit.... If we ignore consistent Bible study, regular prayer, and witnessing, we shut down our own air supply and quench the flame of the Spirit”.

Outward commitment. This is the implication of the horizontal principle of the cross. We must open ourselves to other and let the world feel the warmth of the fire. This witnessing should be spread all around us as Baker puts it:”we need to set Jesus’ benevolence and goodness as our example.” In parallel with this statement, Ellen White says:”The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them ‘Follow Me.’”²⁵

Inward control. Baker says:”to avoid becoming spiritually bland, we are challenged to practice a self-disciplined life style. For this reason a disciplined and sanctified life is needed. If all these three implications are achieved, then the biblical mandate for faithfulness, commitment and fellowship will easily take place in the church.

Non Seventh-day Adventists’ Views

It is interesting to explore the concept of church attendance debated by other denominations. The analysis is the concept of the members going astray from their faith and not regularly weekly meetings is not specific to one denomination. The phenomenon is worldwide and affects all churches.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 43.

Jack Hyles

Jack Hyles, loyal pastor of first Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, in his book shows 'How to boost your church;'²⁶ in order to do that he selects some key points by which the flock can be kept safe: (1). Love your people.(2). Be expressive in your love for the people. (3). Pray for your people. (4). Do not use your people to build a Great Work, but use them to build a Great People. (5). Make your people feel that you are theirs. (6). Eat in the homes of your people, and frequently organize fellowship meal in the church. (7). Give the people time at home. (8). Be with them in hours of need. (9). Remember that your people make you what you are. (10). Never neglect anything from your people.

A thorough analysis of the principles suggested by the writer clearly indicates that the minister is the architect of his congregation. There should be harmony between the minister and his church. He goes on to demonstrate that though people are in church, they remain equally concerned with their social, mental, physical wellbeing. This includes also their future and security. Although the church a might be meant to provide finances, job opportunities, but with socialization members can achieve a great deal of their dreams.

Martin Luther

Analyzing the phenomenon of racism that affects the believers in the United States of America which weaken the faith and love of the church members, Martin Luther demonstrates in his excellent book *Strength to Love*²⁷ that the only way to overcome it is to love. The love for one another should be continuous, unconditional,

²⁶ Jack Frasure Hyles, *How to Boost your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 1961.

²⁸ Martin Luther (1929-1968), *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 37-74.

and inclusive. To maintain and cultivate brotherly love, one should have the spirit of pardon, that is one should be prompt to forgive and remove any hindrance that can hamper good relationship. In the process of the mandate for faithfulness, commitment and fellowship we are called to put away all sentiments and feelings that are against the way God wants his children to be. Martin Luther himself has demonstrated the spirit of love, acceptance and mutual cohabitation in the church. Being in Christ, the attitude of church members should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Phil2:4-5)

From International Church Growth Ministry

In a nutshell and under the pen writing of Francis Bola Akin-John,²⁸ God has gifted every member of His body gifts that will help them to contribute to the growth and well-being of the church; for every member of the church, there must be commitment on three levels:

- Commitment to Christ – He must be Lord and Savior – Every member must get to know Him intimately.
- Commitment to the body of Christ – commitment to Christ demands commitment to His local body, the church members must be partakers and contribute their own quota to her growth.
- Commitment to the work of Christ in the world. Christians must discover and utilize the gifts of God in their life to expand His kingdom. Everybody should be kept busy and assigned to a particular ministry in the church, each one according to his/her abilities.

²⁸ Francis Bola Akin-John, *32 Strategic Ways to Increase Church Attendance*

Final Analysis and Conclusion

Joining the church through baptism or profession of faith should not be seen as the end of a process. The Church Manual says:” Baptismal candidates and those being received into fellowship by profession of faith shall affirm their acceptance of the fundamental beliefs in the presence of the local congregation or other properly appointed body.”²⁹ This is the first step in the discipleship process. Real Christian should support the church and participate in all activities.

When joining the church a vow is taken according to what is stipulated in the church manual as thus: “Do you believe in church organization? Is it your purpose to worship God and to support the church through your tithes and offerings and by *your personal effort and influence*?”³⁰ (emphasis supplied).

Christian life should be contagious; it should be an experience of excitement, joy, peace, even when sorrow can come along the way. The pathway of sorrow is the only way leading to the country where bitterness is unknown. No matter the reason we should keep marching forward, and one falls astray, we should try to understand what brought him down to that level and by the process of companionship gain him back to the service.

In summary, the theoretical foundation drawn from the Bible has enabled us to discover how church attendance can be increased. The book of Acts 2:46 provide an insight of a true story of how the Christian church began and grew. They were attending all church meetings without being forced to do so; because of the love they had for their Master and the idea of the second coming of Jesus. They were together,

²⁹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring; MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010) , 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

sharing together their burdens as the result of it, the church expanded both in quantity and in quality. As time passed by and for fear to be persecuted and killed, the attendance on church meetings started decreasing and apostasy arose. The book of Heb10:25 give the reasons of such apostasy.

From others authors we saw that the lack of training of those called to lead the church favored the growth of absentees and resulted in apostasy. The new converts were not well taught to how to resist temptations and other factors which will lead them into apostasy. The church should be able to discover and utilize the gifts God has given to His church for the expansion of his kingdom, and at some extent, provide the means to the members for their physical, spiritual and material well-being.

The next chapter will analyze what has been done so far in order to solve the problem that is to increase weekly church attendances and elaborate on new strategies for a successful implementation.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL SETTING

The West Cameroon Mission has its headquarters in Bali, Douala. It is one of the nine fields in central Africa Union Mission. It is made up of four administrative regions: North West region, South West region, West region and the Littoral region. The specificity of the West Cameroon Mission is the two regions of Cameroon where the English language is spoken belong to this field. The total member amounts to 5.433, according to the Mission's records. The west Cameroon Mission comprises 49 churches, 57 compagnies, pastors, 25 districts and 3 administrators.¹

The west Cameroon Mission is made of specific groups of people. The Semi-Bantus people, along with the Bamoun people who are mostly found in the West region; the North-West region is populated with the Tikars, Widikum and Fulani people. The Fulani include the Bororo and Hausa people. The Bantus people: they include: Bassa, Bakoko, Douala, Mbo and Bakundu people. They are also some pygmies along the coastal region. The regions that are part of the west Cameroon Mission have abundant and diverse natural resources (oil, natural gas, iron, zinc, etc.). Agriculture is also rich and abundant (cocoa, coffee, palm oil, banana, fruits, vegetables, etc).²

¹ Secrétariat Général de l'Association de l'Ouest Cameroun, *Audit et Vérification des Registres des Eglises*, Archives 2011

² Republic of Cameroon, *Document on Poverty Alleviation*. Yaoundé, 2003.

Table 1. The specificity of the Littoral Region³

Departments	Moungo, Nkam, Sanaga-Maritime, Wouri
Capital	Douala
Area	20,239km ² (7.814 sq mile)
Population /Density	2, 202,340 inhabitants (2004 census), 109/km ² (282/sq. mi.)
Governor	Joseph Beti Assomo (appointed by presidential decree in 2012)

The City of Douala and its Specific Settings

Douala is the economic capital of Cameroon, also serving as the main entrance into the country through the international airport and sea port at the Atlantic coast.

Douala is the headquarters of the littoral region and the seat the regional institutions.

Douala has an estimated population of 2 million of inhabitants coming from different areas of the country and beyond the national boundaries. It should be noted that as earlier said, the city serves as the main entrance into the country through land, sea and air. This is due to the fact that 75^{o/o} of industrial activities in Cameroon are carried in Douala. Douala becomes a centre of attraction for migrant principally the youth from rural areas in search of jobs. The Bantus people – Bassa, Banen, Bamileke, Bakoko, Bakweri, Mbo, Douala - who mostly populate the town, cohabite with the people coming from other parts of the country and from abroad – West Africa. Because of this constant immigration, the town is facing today several infrastructural problems due to an increase in population such as a severe traffic jam at rush hours, urban pollution from poor sewage disposal mechanisms, rapid growth of urban ghettos, etc. Illegal land occupations are also being expropriated and new roads are being constructed.⁴

³ www.cameroon-tour.com

⁴ Mphoweh, Jude Nzembayie, "Cameroon in Brief", www.cameroon-tour.com, 2009

Political Setting

Douala is also a center of political concentration. The city is chaired by a governor appointed by a presidential decree. The main institutions and administration found in Yaoundé the political capital are represented in Douala, and also some diplomatic representations. The main political parties in Cameroon are found in Douala even some mushroom parties and this influence the life of people.

Major Sources of Income of the Population

Douala is the economic capital of the country. It attracts the population in and out of the country. Douala hosts most of the industrial companies of the country. All the sectors of activities are found in Douala, so that everyone who finds himself in the city can earn a living. Douala also supplies sub regional countries in goods – Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad Republic and the Central African Republic.

Presence of Other Christian Churches and Religious Beliefs

The Republic of Cameroon (cf appendix B) is a lay State, where many denominations and religious beliefs mingle and mix together. They can be divided into two major groups namely: recognized Christian churches and sects. The Christian churches gather about 70% of the global country population. In this group we find:

Catholicism

It is the most important group in Douala. The Catholic Church is highly distinguished in Cameroon in general and Douala in particular with modern social institutions in the domain of health, education, and orphanage. The Catholic Church contains most of the majority of youths, political leaders, business men, traditional rulers and other very important personalities. This group is dominant. They have a radio, station in Douala, a printing press, a University, and many other facilities. All these contribute to attract people and make them easily to become members of their church.

Protestantism

This group encompasses many denominations and contains about 40% of the population. Under this umbrella falls:

1. The Cameroon Baptist Church
2. The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
3. The Cameroon Union Baptist churches
4. The Cameroon Evangelical Church
5. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cameroon.

Like the Catholics, these churches also have social institutions in the domains of health, education. They contribute in the fight against AIDS, against poverty, and the promotion of human rights.

Pentecostalism

This category has internal segmentations making it diverse and at time different from one to another. Some operate clandestinely and are not recognized by the State through the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization who issues the authorization of functioning after that the head of State has issue the recognition of the church.

Sects

The Republic of Cameroon does not have a state religion; because it has a laity status and for that reason it has been frequently the object of denominational assault. These denominations are known as sects and they are not easy to be assessed and numbered. Amongst them we can enumerate the Rosicrucian, the Mormons, the Ekankar, etc. These sects attract people because they claim to claim Christian faith⁵.

Islam

Muslims comprise roughly 24 percent of the 20 million inhabitants of Cameroon. Approximately 27 percent identify themselves as Sunni and 3 percent Shia while the majority of the rest do not associate themselves with a particular group. Islam is found everywhere in Cameroon and the chosen area of my research is not at the least. They target young people, poor people and business men for conversion. Islam is sponsored by the Islamic Conference Organization and the Islamic Bank for Development. They offered scholarship to students, and participate in the fight against AIDS, poverty.

Profile of the Wouri Division

Wouri is a department or division of the Littoral province in Cameroon where the Douala 3 district is located. It forms the area around the major city of Douala, and is named after the major Wouri River. The department covers an area of 932 km² and as of 2001 had an estimated population of 2 million inhabitants.

⁵ Cameroon Ministry of Public Investments and Territory Planning

Douala III District and its Singular Setting

The Douala III district is one of the 25 districts in the West Cameroon Mission. The Douala 3 district is a new district which was founded after a vote no 134-11⁶ was carried and chaired by the president of the executive committee of the Mission on the date of August 9, 2011. The churches shaping the new district were formerly attached to Douala center 1 district (NDOGBONG church), to Douala center 2 district (CCC/SOCARTO church), PK1 (BEEDI and KONDI).

Table 2 and Figure 1 give the summary of the comparative membership of each church of the Douala III district, and the height of each church in terms of overall district membership. Thus both will help to sought out the percentage of attendances.

⁶ Secrétariat Général de l'Association de l'Ouest Cameroun, vote 134-11 : voté le réaménagement des districts ecclésiastiques et le redéploiement des ouvriers pastoraux, Août 2011.

Table 2. Comparative Members in Each Church

Church	Membership
Beedi	100
Ccc/Socarto	90
Kondi	105
Ndogbong	81
Total	376

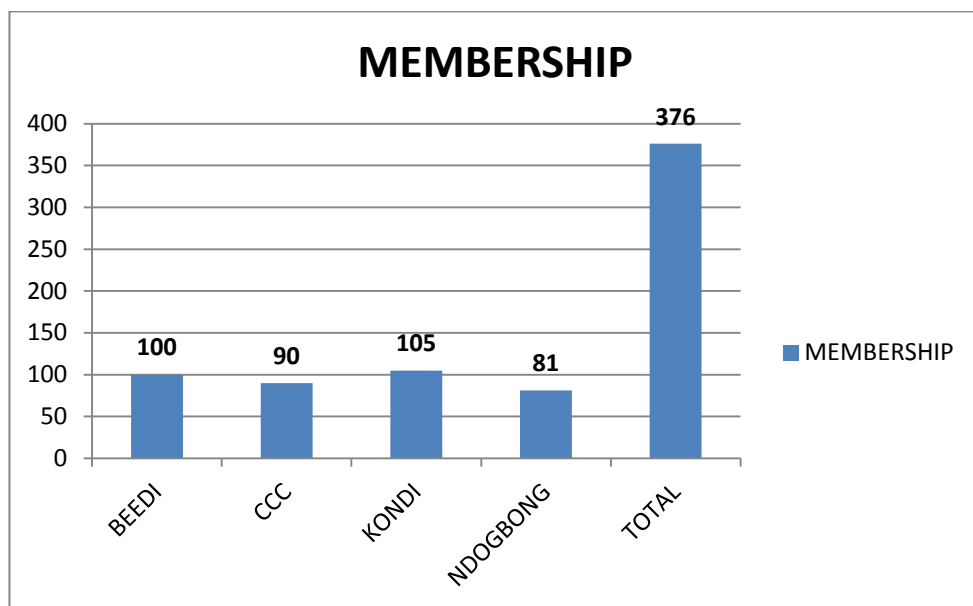


Figure.1. Membership Comparative Figures per Church

Table 3. Comparative Church Membership in the Last Five Years

Church/year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
BEEDI	200	210	250	280	100
CCC/SOCARTO	294	172	120	135	90
KONDI	185	212	220	200	105
NDOGBONG	180	185	185	186	81
TOTAL	759	779	775	801	376

Table 3 gives a comparative profile churches while attached on their former districts for the last past five years. What should be noted here is that the Mission initiated a process of audit and regularization of members throughout the field, and the end there is a drastic drop in membership? A critical analysis of the audit really describes the real number of members. Many church clerks did not know to manage the church records; and the end of the training by the secretary general of the mission, final results concerning the real figure of membership throughout the mission were issued.

Because of the readjustment of the new district and other circumstances beyond human control most of the church records and files were damaged and other lost. The comparative figures will be based on the years 2012 and 2013. According to the limitation of the research, two churches will be studied: BEEDI and CCC/SOCARTO. The following tables summarize the appointment by the conference of church pastors and the rotation of church elders in regard of the time spent on the office. Table 3 gives an idea about the pastors who lead those churches between 2009 and 2013. Table 4 shows the elders who were elected each year in Beedi church. Table 5 is about the elders elected each year in CCC/SOCARTO church. Tables 7 and 8 show weekly church attendance.

Table 4. Church Pastors 2009 - 2013

Pastor	Church	Period
Pastor NdjokDavid	CCC/SOCARTO	Feb.2008- Sept.2011
Pastor Soum Jean Clovis	CCC/SOCARTO	Sept.2011-
Pastor Djiedjie Thomas	BEEDI	Sept. 2009- Sept.2011
Pastor Soum Jean Clovis	BEEDI	Sept.2011 -

Table 5. Church Elders in Beedi Church 2009-2013

Year or period	Elders
2009	Ndoumbe Martin, Savom
2010	Batoukini Pierre II, Tolen René, Nanga Dang Albert
2011	Batoukini Pierre II, Nlep Oscar, Tolen René
2012	Batoukini Pierre II, Ndoumbe Martin
2013	Batoukini Pierre II, Ndoumbe Martin, Ndiba Jean Jonas

Table 6. Church Elders in CCC Socarto Church

Year or period	Elders
2008	Eytemou Daniel, Ebeye Moise
June 2008	Si Si Jean René
2009	Si Si Jean René, Ebeye Moise
2010	Ebeye Moise, Efoutebe Jean Paul
2011	Si Si Jean René, Ebeye Moise, Efoutebe Jean Paul
2012 – 2013	Si Si Jean René, Ebeye Moise, Efoutebe Jean Paul

Table 7. Comparative Weekly Church Attendance In Beedi

	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday
January 2012	Adults: 13	12	20	31	22	29	29	32
	Children: 07	6	10	20	2	8	2	9
	Visitors: 02	2	3	4	6	3	5	3
February 2012	Adults: 20	28	15	32	29	34	20	29
	Children: 3	6	2	9	3	9	4	10
	Visitors: 2		3	2	4	3	3	4
March 2012	Adults: 25	32	27	25	19	50	25	38
	Children: 8	4		4		8	2	4
	Visitors: 2	8		1		4	3	3
April 2012	Adults: 19	31	11	19	21	15	18	22
	Children: 3	6	2	1	4	7	2	
	Visitors: 2					1		
May 2012	Adults: 15	24	10	20	18	32	20	33
	Children: 2	4	2	6	4	11	6	9
	Visitors: 1	2		1	3	2	2	4
June 2012	Adults: 12	22	22	20	29	30	26	27
	Children: 2	4	8	2	4	2	4	10
	Visitors: 2	1	1	2	4	2	1	1
July 2012	Adults: 16	20	16	15	15	16	19	25
	Children: 4	7	4	3	3	6	2	4
	Visitors: 2	1	2	1	5	4	4	2
August 2012	Adults: 19	27	19	21	21	20	26	36
	Children: 4	7	2	4	4	3	4	2
	Visitors: 2	8	1	5	2	3		11
September 2012	Adults: 20	20	29	27	18	25	20	40
	Children: 3	2			2	8	4	6
	Visitors: 4	1	2	1	2	4	5	3
October 2012	Adults: 14	16	17	20	12	14	17	19
	Children: 3	6	4	6	2	8	4	6
	Visitors: 4	7		4	4	4	1	7
November 2012	Adults: 19	20	15	24	24	30	15	22
	Children: 15	18	6	4	2	6	1	4
	Visitors: 6	4	7	2	5	2	1	2
December 2012	Adults: 13	20	20	34	18	30	21	22
	Children: 3	4	6	8	3	4	4	1
	Visitors: 2	6	3	5	4	6	6	1

(Table continues)

Table 7 (continued). Comparative Weekly Church Attendance In Beedi

	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday
January	Adults: 25	29	21	21	18	28	31	23
2013	Children: 3	1	3	2	3	4	2	4
	Visitors: 4		1	1	2	2	3	2
February	Adults: 12	22	20	12	12	14	13	26
2013	Children: 3	3	6	2	1	4	5	10
	Visitors: 1	1		1			1	5
March 2013	Adults: 15	9	25	20	21	20	25	30
	Children: 15	6	6	10	3	7	3	6
	Visitors: 1	1	2		2	4	4	6
April 2013	Adults: 15	22	15	19	16	18	9	14
	Children: 3	6		6	4	7	2	
	Visitors: 3		1	1	4	1	2	2

Table 8. Comparative Weekly Church Attendance in CCC Church

	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday
January 2012	Adults: 40	50	30	25	30	55	31	44
	Children: 04	10	6	12	3	9	7	15
	Visitors	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
February 2012	Adults: 41	55	30	35	33	40	31	29
	Children: 5	8	7	9	6	7	2	7
	Visitors: 2	2	3	0	3	0	5	4
March 2012	Adults: 16	30	39	27	34	34	36	42
	Children: 4	5	6	10	6	9	10	11
	Visitors: 0	3	5	10	0	5	6	8
April 2012	Adults: 39	46	33	26	29	40	30	45
	Children: 4	7	6	6	7	8	4	9
	Visitors: 2	0	0	5	3	0	2	1
May 2012	Adults: 31	27	28	39	30	39	38	45
	Children: 2	4	4	7	8	15	5	10
	Visitors: 1	0	4	3	8	5	4	5
June 2012	Adults: 28	33	29	35	33	42	32	42
	Children: 2	4	6	9	5	7	4	6
	Visitors: 2	0	2	4	2	7	4	3
July 2012	Adults: 30	35	29	41	39	40	33	42
	Children: 4	5	4	9	4	6	4	5
	Visitors: 2	0	2	0	4	0	2	0
August 2012	Adults: 31	36	29	27	22	36	30	40
	Children: 4	5	4	7	5	3	6	7
	Visitors: 2	0	2	5	0	6	4	5
September 2012	Adults: 40	38	29	31	30	33	29	36
	Children: 3	4	8	6	4	5	7	6
	Visitors: 4	2	4	9	6	0	6	8
October 2012	Adults: 31	27	53	25	35	26	29	45
	Children: 3	4	5	6	7	6	4	7
	Visitors: 4	2	5	6	0	0	5	4
November 2012	Adults: 28	33	20	27	29	28	31	35
	Children: 2	4	3	4	5	2	4	3
	Visitors: 2	3	1	4	3	5	0	6
December 2012	Adults: 24	32	33	45	29	40	32	46
	Children: 3	4	2	0	6	7	4	5
	Visitors: 2	0	4	2	4	0	5	4
January 2013	Adults: 25	32	30	45	29	39	20	45
	Children: 3	4	2	4	6	7	4	9
	Visitors: 4	2	4	6	9	5	7	1

(Table continues)

Table 8 (continued). Comparative Weekly Church Attendance in CCC Church

	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday	Wed	Friday
February 2013	Adults: 27	32	28	42	30	42	25	20
	Children: 3	4	2	4	4	6	4	7
	Visitors: 1	2	4	5	3	0	7	5
March 2013	Adults: 22	34	28	40	29	33	32	40
	Children: 4	4	5	2	4	7	5	4
	Visitors: 1	2	4	2	2	5	4	2
April 2013	Adults: 25	32	36	30	26	38	29	44
	Children: 3	4	4	6	4	5	4	9
	Visitors: 3	2	4	6	2	4	3	5

Assessment of the Methods Used in Evangelism in those Churches

From the interviews and reports from those churches, classical methods were used to win souls. They were specific periods where public campaigns were conducted and chaired by either the mission's evangelist or the mission's president. In addition to that, the church with its personal ministry director initiated some outings where personal contact with people were encouraged so as to mingle with them and win their sympathy and get them converted. The churches involved in this research, are parted in small groups. Most of the churches vary their methods in function with the population and the category of people targeted. These methods are in response to the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 and applied in both churches.

It is true that those methods were fruitful but they were limited, because the strategies used were only oriented on soul winning, but nothing to preserve the new members to be firm and be regular to the meetings no matter the reason. To retain new members and get the old revived, seminars, and spiritual week of emphasis were initiated both by the local church pastor and the mission. But a complete

analysis of Figure 2 demonstrate the limitation and inadequacy of such methods. The main weekly meetings are not attended by even the half number of members; in certain cases it is worse. Specific signs of apostasy can be perceived, when the church neglects to care and nurture her members. Table 9 gives an overall view why members do not regularly attend weekly meetings.

Table 9. Reasons Why Members Leave the Church

Reasons why members do not regularly attend weekly meetings	Participants	Respons.
They know the mission of the church	100	83
They know the days of church meetings	100	70
They know the different hours of church meetings	100	51
They know the importance of prayer meetings	100	90
They regularly attend all church meetings	100	50
They only go to church on Sabbaths	100	85
They only go on Wednesdays and Sabbaths	100	30
They only go on Fridays and Sabbaths	100	45
They don't go on weekly meetings	100	72
Their aim in attending prayer meetings is not realized	100	51
Their talents are not recognized in the church	100	45
Their jobs coincide with the hours of church meetings	100	75
The distance to the church is an handicap: no transport fee	100	73
The distance to the church: insecurity while returning home	100	74
The church leadership: the appointed church elders	100	50
The church leadership: the local church pastor	100	20
Unemployment	100	30
Sickness	100	50
They are affected with church problems	100	60

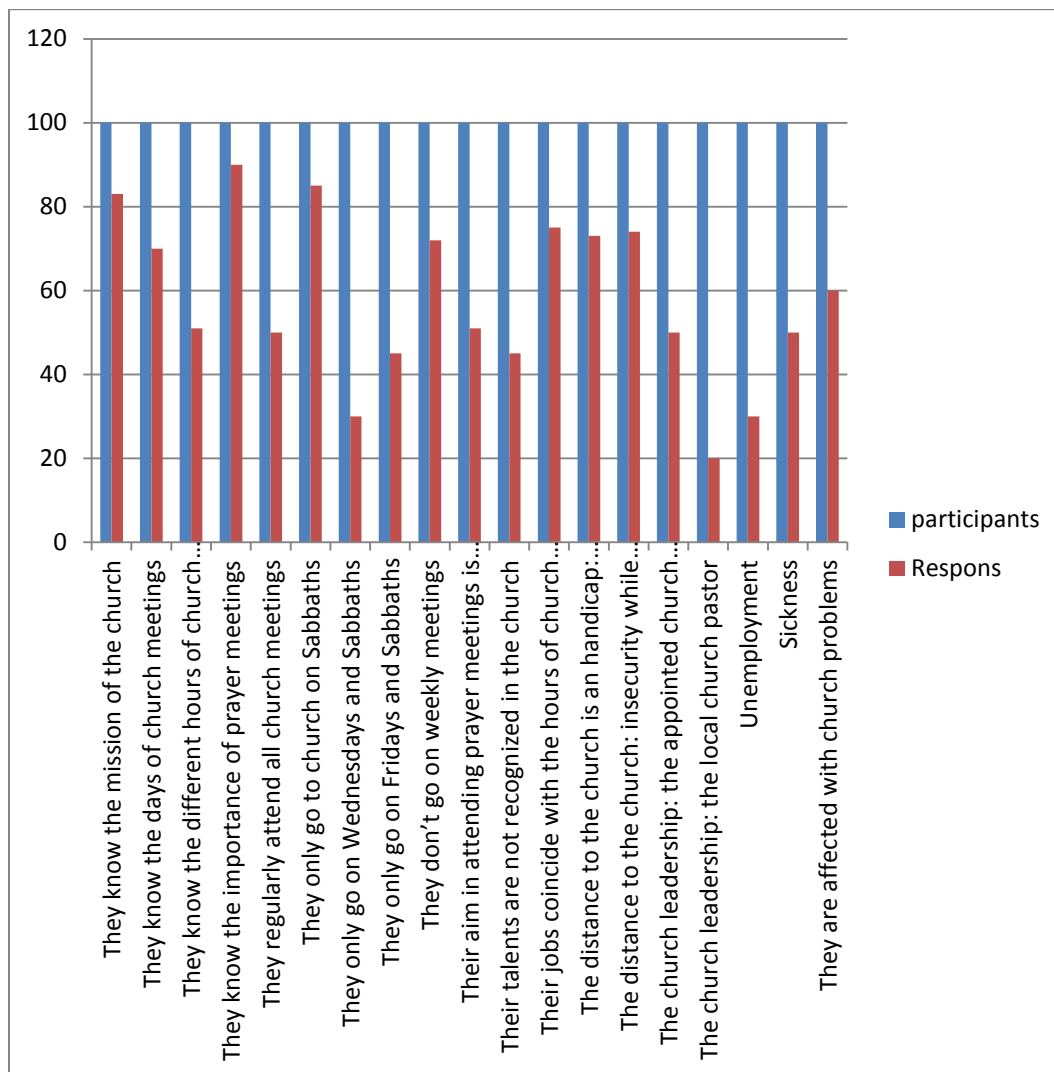


Figure 2. Comparative Figures on The Reasons Why People Don't Regularly Attend Weekly Church Meetings

A brief analysis of the comparative figures in both churches demonstrate a lack of fervor. In fact real Christianity should be in essence contagious. It should be exciting and joyful, and even when sorrow interferes there should be a spirit of togetherness. Joining the church should not be considered by someone as the end of a process, but a step in the discipleship process. The truth here is that most of the brethren who do not regularly attend church meetings are not affected negatively with the mission of the church as found in Revelation 14:6-12. The factors leading them to

go astray are social, professional, and spiritual. The fruits of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22 are not experienced at times in the church, because of lack of commitment, and consecration to the Lord.

The other specificity is the distance between the church center and their homes. The high rate of insecurity surrounding the town and particularly the areas where those brethren reside hinder them to attend weekly meetings; both on Wednesdays and Fridays services start at 6:30 pm and close around 8:00 pm. The distance factor is also attributed to the traffic jam; those hours are considered to be the rush hours.

The reason dealing with the position in the church also affects members to attend regularly weekly meetings. In the years past, according to the members interviewed, the church pastor did not fairly conduct the church election; elders and church officers were appointed not according the principles described in the church manual, cf. Church Manual, chapter 8 and 9 on *local church officers and organizations and elections*. After some research and survey, it appears that those officers who were elected were not capable to handle church administration, and despite the complaints of some members the church pastor did not consider them.

The other reason is the priority of school for students and job for the workers; the living cost of living makes the majority of church members to forego church meetings in the profits of their activities where they can earn money. Most of this people attend church services only on Sabbaths. For the students, they usually close at 3:30 pm; most of them are distant from the schools and because of a lack of necessary means, it becomes difficult to them to go first at home, and with the home works to do, attend church meetings. And when there is a clash with church activities they prioritize school activities.

The survey reveals to the researcher what can be done so to be involved in church activities and make them to constantly attend weekly meetings. The following points will increase the percentage of weekly church attendance in a reasonable percentage:

1. The call for consecration to God and constant reminder of the mission of the church; the church manual make it clear that once we join the church, it becomes imperative to support the church physically and spiritually.
2. The church should take time to train and educate the member trough seminars, workshops and give them the opportunity to minister. An attitude of collaboration, unity and fellowship should be emphasized and encouraged amongst brethren.
3. Appropriate and adequate programs that fit the needs of the church; thus Wednesdays should be devoted to fervent prayers, testimonies and praises. The variety in programs should be initiated and avoid routines and monotony.
4. Preaching church rolls should include all members regardless of age and status. Those who don't constantly attend weekly church meetings complain that the same persons are programmed to conduct church services whether they are fit or not.
5. The timing of weekly meetings; the programs should start and end on time so as to give venue to those who leave where there is insecurity at certain hours of the night can return safely without being attacked.
6. The availability of means to assist the needy and poor; the church is also the store house. Members should be trained and educated the way the apostolic church was: *"they had all things common, and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need"* (Acts2:44-45).

7. The West Cameroon Mission in the strategy to solve the problem of the students should build schools and this will help our students to attend weekly meetings.

The survey gives signs to describe the atmosphere in the church and what lead some to stop attending weekly meetings and the necessity to accommodate the programs so as to regain them. It becomes a priority to everyone to be committed to the Lord and develop a spirit of fellowship which makes it mandatory to love one another in the approach of accepting with joy those who for one or other reasons have left the church and by the interpellation of the Spirit are back to the fold. Like the parable of the «Lost son and the Running Father” the son who remain faithful should welcome his brother. In this process, one should tactful and need constant present of the Holy Spirit to lead him.

CHAPTER 4

PROGRAM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION

The objective of this chapter is to describe in details the program designed to solve the problem that is to sought out a strategy to increase weekly church meeting attendance. It includes three phases:

- A. The designing of the program.
- B. The implementation of the program.
- C. The evaluation of the program.

In the perspective to reach the objective assigned to this research, the researcher obtained the permission from the Mission's administration; votes were taken the churches of BEEDI and CCC/SOCARTO to consult church records for the accuracy of figures; the church clerks and deacons were consulted; church elders and former pastors of the selected churches were interviewed, and finally a questionnaire was designed and given to church members of the selected churches for their views and contributions.

Design/Preparation of the Program

LECTURE 1. ACCEPTING CHRIST AS A PERSONAL SAVIOR

I. The Bible, God's method for reaching man

A. There was a time where on this earth when man neither had, nor needed, a Bible.

1. God created a perfect world (Gen. 1:12; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25; 1:31).

2. The people whom God created had nothing to be afraid, only happiness with God

3. There was contentment and happiness between God and the created beings (Gen.1, 2).

B. The Bible is not just Another Book.

1. It's God's Word

Claims from the Old Testament (Gen.1:3; Ex.3:1-7; Numb.1:1; 2Sam.23:1, 2; Isa.55:8-11; Jer.1:4-9; Amos3:7).

Claims from Jesus Himself (Matt.1:21-23; Matt.4:4, 7, 10; Luke24:27, 44-48; John5:46-47).

Claims of other New Testament passages (1Cor.14:37; 1Thess.2:13; 1Pet.1:10-11; 2Pet.1:16).

2. It contains the solutions to the problems of our world

3. It contains the secret of how we can live, both now and in the future, with God. (Ps.119:11,105).

NB: This part of the study is meant to guide the student's belief in inspiration and gear him to the second step; because more and more we need to be acquainted with the current objective and subjective ideas concerning the inspiration of the Bible.

C. The changed lives of those who study and accept God and Christ as revealed in the Bible

1. The Bible predicts that its contents change lives

a. Ps.119:11

b. Jer.15:16

c. Acts9:6; Acts3:15

II. God's Plan of Restoration

A. The Original Purity and the tragic fall of our first parents Gen.1:26-27.

1. There was no barrier between them and God.

2. They lived in harmony with God's way, and God revealed His fullness

to them

B. There was one condition to remain in that perfect condition

1. Obedience to God's will (Gen.2:15-17)

2. There was no forced obedience: they were free to choose.

C. Their tragic choice: Gen.3:1-7.

1. The freedom to choose led them to disobedience

2. The tragic fall demonstrate the power and the cunning of the tempter

D. The consequence of disobedience to God's will (Gen.2:17; 3:19; 3:4-24).

1. They had an 'eye-opening'

2. They had broken their loyalty to God.

3. They had incurred an incurable disease: "sin".

4. They lost everything: their face-to-face communion with God; their

purity; their perfect family happiness; the equality of man with man; their

dominion over other the created things; their perfect home and access to the tree

of life.

E. The results of sin: Deterioration

1. Cain kills Abel, Gen.4

2. The flood (Gen.6:6-8.)

3. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Only four rescuable, and one of those turned back (Gen.18:20-19:26).

4. Spiritual deterioration: God's image slowly disappeared in man

(Rom.5:12)

5. Physical deterioration: man's life span and stature were decreased

(Ps.90:10).

6. Mental deterioration: the mind became dwarfed.

F. The wonderful plan of restoration

1. Remember what the Word of God can do in man's life Ps.119:11,105

2. God's word is light and that light is Christ; Christ came to show us that we can find a better way than the way of sin.

3. Christ in His word reveals every necessary secret by which all mankind can experience restoration to the pure and holy image of God, in which man was first created; John3:16.

4. Faith is believing – and believing in something- Heb.11:6.

5. In Old Testament times there was no forgiveness in bringing the sacrifice and offering it; in fact the sinner must believe in what it represented – the offering of Christ, the entire plan of salvation. Rom.1:16.

6. Ephesians2:8

7. A wonderful explanation of this verse: “Christ was treated as we deserve –**the wages of sin is death**- that we might be treated as He deserves –**the gift of God is eternal life**-. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His.”¹

¹ E.G.White, *Desire of Ages*, 25.

Conclusion

God offered His son, with the Son's willingness, as a means whereby man could demonstrate his desire to be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with the one he had injured, the One he had turned against. "Grace is the hand of God reaching earthward. Faith is the hand of man reaching up to take hold of God's hand."²

LECTURE 2: HOW TO GROW IN CHRIST

I. Review of Ephesians 2:8

- a. The saving faith
- b. God's grace – His favor towards us who do not deserve it.
- c. Our futures are all dark indeed Rom.3:23
- d. But by the moment we *see* what Christ has done for us at the cross, and believe, the light of the world (John 8:12) has dawned upon our life's pathway.
- e. How can we come to him for help, to receive forgiveness, to begin the pathway of restoration to His likeness?

II. The steps to Christ

- a. Exposure to the word of God Rom.10:17; John 3:16
- b. Fellowship in communion with brethren Acts 2
- c. Constant seeking the face of God through prayer
- d. Repent, admit guilt, and hide nothing from God; Ps.139:1-12;

Prov.15:3

- e. Claim forgiveness in full; 1 John 1:9; Isa.44:3; John 6:35-37.

III. All these steps are the result of the *drawing of Christ*.

² Ibid, 420.

- a. John12:32
- b. Jer.31:3; Ps.139:23-24.

LECTURE 3: OIKOS EVANGELISM AND SMALL GROUP

- I. The concept
- II. The principles underlying friendship evangelism and personal growth
- III. Workshops

Lecture 4: Self-employment

- I. “Lord, mold me” 1Kings3:7-14

The strategy on this study is to discover what the Lord can do for us if we acknowledge His power and sovereignty and allow Him to mold us according to His will. The presence of God in our lives is essential when we are called to make vital choices.

- II. “The barrel of meal shall not waste” 1kings17:8-24

The story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. The key point here is that *God is not respecters of persons*. He provides even to the needy, if we submit ourselves to His will; if we consecrate our lives to Him and accept to share what we have with our fellows, He will provide to the fullness.

- III. “To Jesus I surrender” Ps.23

- IV. How to be motivated

- V. “Seek and thou shall find, Knock and it shall be opened” Matt.7:7-8

- VI. “David had only a stone and a sling” 1Sam.17:49

The aim is to encourage the members who are jobless to start a business no matter what they possess. God is able.

- VII. Togetherness Ps.133:1-3

How to cultivate fellowship, a spirit of acceptance and brotherly love.

Program Implementation

The researcher made time to teach, educate and train. He conducted seminars, and workshops in the chosen churches respectively in BEEDI and CCC/SOCARTO and adequate materials were used. The researcher was assisted with technicians and resources persons for workshops and how to implement those studies in their lives and make them useful. The period of training for both churches was conducted during the first quarter of 2013.

I. Church of BEEDI

The program took place the second week of January, from Sunday 6 to Saturday, January 12, 2013 and the week was captioned “faithfulness and commitment.” Another seminar took place the following week and was oriented on “*self-employment*.” Tables 10 and 11 are about the seminars in Beedi church, captioned “faithfulness and commitment.”

Table 10. Self-employment Seminar Program

Day	Hours Programmes	Attendance	Observatio
Sunday,Jan.6	6H-6H30:songs and praises 6H30-6H45: scripture reading, choir/song, opening prayer 6H45-7H:film projection (the life of Jesus ,part 1) 7H-7H45: Lecture 1:Accepting Christ as a Personal savior 7H45-8H: closing remarks, choir/song, closing prayer	Adults: 50 Children: 15 Visitors: 15	The members were sensitized and attended in great number. The goal was to reach those who were not regularly attending such meetings.
Monday,Jan.7	The same program was followed, but the lecture was entitled God's plan for restoration	Adults: 55 Children:15 Visitors: 20	
Tuesday,Jan.8	Lecture: How to grow in Christ	Adults: 55 Children: 20 Visitors: 25	
Wed,Jan.9	Lecture: steps to Christ	Adults: 60 Children: 20 Visitors: 30	
Thurs,Jan.10	Lecture: Oikos evangelism How to make friends	Adults: 60 Children: 20 Visitors: 25	
Friday,Jan.11	Lecture: Small groups	Adults: 60 Children: 20 Visitors: 30	
Sat,Jan.12	Sabbath worship which ended up with a fellowship meal and in the afternoon workshops	Adults:90 Children: 35 Visitors:40	

Table 11. Seminar on “Self-Employment” in Beedi Church from Sunday Jan 20 to Saturday, Jan 26

Day	Hours Activity	Pannels	Attendance	Obs.
Day 1	The researcher kept the same former order of service. Lecture 1: <i>Lord Mold Me</i> , 1kings3:7-14	Researcher; 1 st church elder; Elie KOUGOP: chief executive officer Macrotech.	Adults: 60 Children: 20 Visitors: 35	
Day 2	Lecture 2: “ <i>The barrel of meal shall not waste</i> ” 1Kings17:8-24.	The researcher; the 1 st church elder; a business man	Adults: 65 Children: 20 Visitors: 30	
Day 3	Lecture: Ps.23 <i>To Jesus I surrender</i>	The researcher; the chief executive officer of Macrotech.	Adults: 75 Children: 20 Visitors: 30	
Day 4	Lecture: <i>How to get motivated</i>	The researcher; the chief executive officer of macrotech; Mrs. WETE Brenda.	Adults: 75 Children: 25 Visitors: 40	
Day 5	Lecture: <i>Seek and thou shall find</i> . Matt.7:7	The same panelists	Adults: 80 Children: 20 Visitors: 37	
Day 6	Lecture: <i>David had only a stone and a sling</i> . 1Sam.17:49	The same panelists	Adults: 80 Children: 22 Visitors: 38	
Day 7	God’s time is the best	In the morning the researcher conducted the divine service; the afternoon was meant for workshop with the same panelists.	Adults: 102 Children: 40 Visitors: 45	

II. The Church of CCC/SOCARTO

Still concerning the implementation of the program, the month of February was oriented to the church of CCC/SOCARTO, with the same structure (see Table 12).

Table 12. Self-Employment Seminars in CCC

Day	Hours Programmes	Attendance	Observation
Sunday, Feb.3	6H-6H30: songs and praises 6H30-6H45: scripture reading, choir/song, opening prayer 6H45-7H: film projection (the life of Jesus ,part 1) 7H-7H45: Lecture 1: Accepting Christ as a Personal savior 7H45-8H: closing remarks, choir/song, closing prayer	Adults: 65 Children: 16 Visitors: 20	The members were sensitized and attended in great number. The goal was to reach those who were not regularly attending such meetings.
Monday, Feb.4	The same program was followed, but the lecture was entitled God's plan for restoration	Adults: 70 Children: 20 Visitors: 20	
Tuesday, Feb.5	Lecture: How to grow in Christ	Adults: 76 Children: 20 Visitors: 25	
Wed, Feb.6	Lecture: steps to Christ	Adults: 46 Children: 20 Visitors: 35	
Thurs, Feb.7	Lecture: Oikos evangelism How to make friends	Adults: 80 Children: 21 Visitors: 30	
Friday, Feb.8	Lecture: Small groups	Adults: 80 Children: 26 Visitors: 35	
Saturday, Feb.9	Sabbath worship which ended up with a fellowship meal, 3 baptisms and in the afternoon workshops	Adults: 95 Children: 42 Visitors: 37	

When the surveys were conducted in the field on both churches, the researcher came to realize that most of the members who were not regularly attending weekly meetings was due to the fact that the programs were not coinciding with their needs. They needed particular issues to be addressed and treated in the church. The attendances on each meetings denoted that they satisfied and promised to remain committed to the Lord.

Under the supervision of the researcher also, small groups were formed and the month of March saw the launching of those groups; all members without exception were encouraged to participate and involved on every part activities. This is a model of the format or file given to the selected churches.

Program Evaluation

Figure 3 shows that before the research took place in the chosen churches, there were a low percentage of members attending regularly weekly meetings. In BEEDI church, the percentage of weekly meetings is 30% whereas that of CCC/SOCARTO is 40%.

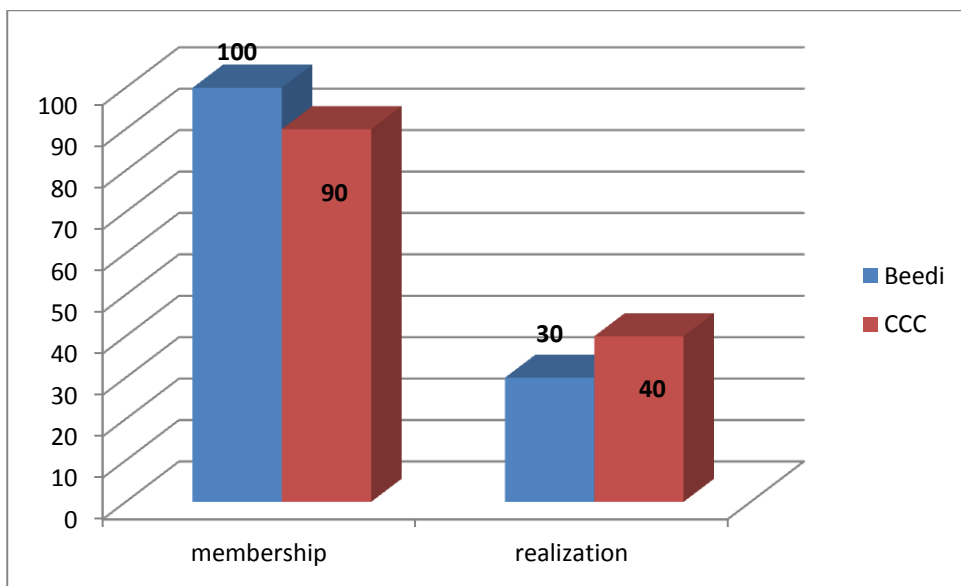


Figure 3. Comparative Church Attendance before the Beginning of the Research

Let's now consider the results and the end of the research. The first to be considered is BEEDI church. Figure 4 below indicates that the rhythm of weekly church attendance raised from 30% to almost 60% the double.

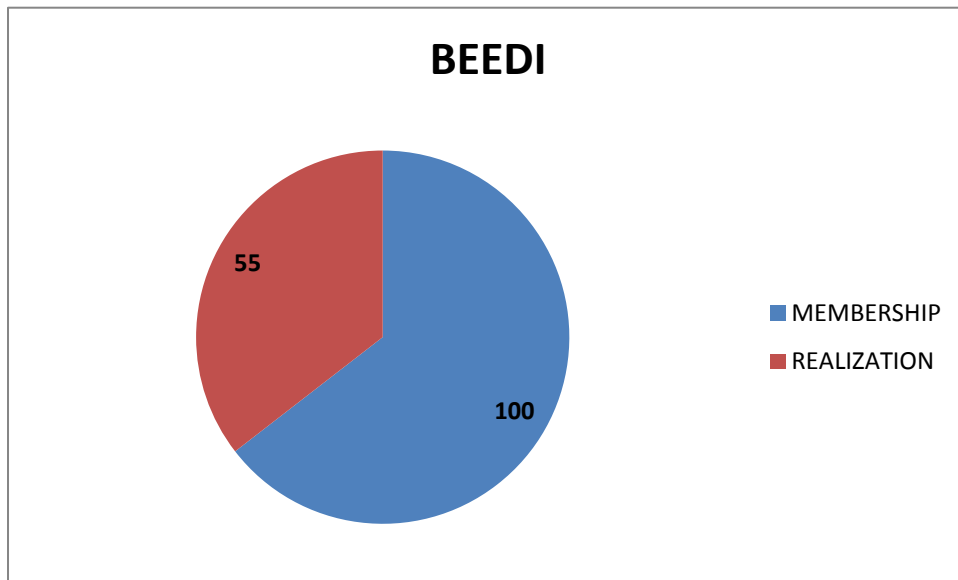


Figure 4. Comparison from Each Church

Analysis from the Members and Elders

From the elders of the selected churches, the impressions are good –if we consider the rate of realization in 55% in Beedi and 60% in ccc- and they felt satisfied with the results beyond imagination that were obtained at the end of the process. Some were skeptical at the beginning but as the research proceeded, they witness what the Holy Spirit can do in the live of man. They pleaded to see the strategy be implemented all over the mission's field so as to lessen the number of brethren who abstain themselves from weekly meetings.

From the members, they were excited and this reminded them of the old time religion. They expressed the hope to see the administration from the mission carrying the project in order to lessen the number of members withholding themselves from

weekly meetings. The challenge is at stake. Something must be done. When we consider all those “mushrooms churches” germinating at every corner of the street, a strategy must come out. The research was well supported by the brethren who felt happy to fellowship with those who formerly abstain themselves from weekly meetings.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Designing a strategy to increase weekly church attendance meetings in Douala III in general and specifically in BEEDI and CCC/SOCARTO churches has been the main purpose of this research. The decline of attendance in those meetings is alarming. Some observers after some reflections have come to the conclusion that weekly meetings should be cancelled. It is not surprising to observe that in some places, just a few numbers of believers gather and the importance of such meetings is decreasing. The importance of weekly meetings should not be disregarded by church members who have good spiritual standards. The value of the encounter between the Lord and His children in the course of the week cannot be underestimated by those who understand the mission of the church.

The theoretical biblical foundation used in this study is contained in Acts2:46 and Hebrews10:25. These texts were selected among many other based to the interrelation with the topic. God has a particular esteem to His church and expects his members to portray His love to the world. The text of Acts2:46, is connected to the topic in the sense that it exposes clearly what the church is supposed to be in terms of care giving responsibility and the result of genuine love among brethren. The text is a call to faithfulness, commitment to the Lord in the perspective of His second coming as found in John14:1-3. Concerning the text of Hebrews10:25, the admonition is given to that the members will never stop attending church meetings –public or private-. The

text underlines the dramatic problem of apostasy with its terrible and incurable disease which is sin; and when sin is conceived, it leads to spiritual, moral, and physical deterioration.

From the selected churches it was very difficult to develop a strategy to bring back reluctant members who were not regularly attending weekly church meetings. From the surveys and interviews gathered in the field, many reasons were given, at time pertinent as an excuse from non- attending those meetings. The researcher took time to explain, educate, teach and train the members along the line with the elders and church officers on the importance of the church and of the weekly meetings. The general approach to those who don't regularly attend weekly meetings should be done with tact, prayers, and the continual presence of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

At the end of the research the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Church members no matter the number of years spent in the church need continual and permanent training and education concerning the mission and objectives of the church.
2. The parable of the *Lost Son and the Running Father*, the parable of the prodigal son can be used to prevent members from apostasy and remain faithful and committed to the Lord.
3. God entrusted to man many talents, and those talents are to be used for the edification of the church, and all members should be given the opportunity to minister.
4. Good and relevant program should be conducted.
5. The members were divided into small groups, and where the distance from their homes to the church and because of the increase of insecurity, they were

called to worship in their different small groups on weekly meetings and come together on Sabbath in the church.

Recommendations

From what the researcher observed during the surveys, implementation and evaluation of the program, the following recommendations were made:

1. Every local church should set up a special committee to study the membership attendance trend during every meeting. This committee should be conducted by trained and equipped deacons who register the attendances and draw the figures.
2. The administration of the Mission should print membership card and distribute to all churches. This will be a step to set up a strategy to monitor the membership trend and fluctuation.
3. During church election, pastors should be objective in appointing officers to manage church's affairs. The appointment of men, who are not fit to lead out, causes instability in the church.
4. The west Cameroon Mission should make efforts to recruit more pastors. The pastors in the west Cameroon Mission are few and most of them are district pastors with at least 5 churches and supervising a department at the Mission's level. Members don't feel the presence of their pastor and tend to backslide.
5. The General conference has declared this quinquenium, the period of *Revival and Reformation*. There is an urgent need to constantly communicate to the churches ways and means in order to implement revival and reformation in the local churches.

6. Small groups should be effective in all churches. They enable members to have close and intimate fellowship and can easily share their prayers, testimonies and needs. Small groups also solve the problem of finance and distances.

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