

Closing the Church's Backdoor: A Seminar Designed to Develop Nigerian Assemblies of God Leaders Who Would More Effectively Assimilate and Retain People in Their Churches

Reverend John O. Ikoni

ABSTRACT

The Nigerian Assemblies of God has witnessed great evangelism explosion, resulting in great harvest of souls into the kingdom of God and phenomenal growth during the Decade of Harvest (1990–2000). In spite of this astronomical growth, many congregations are experiencing a loss in attendance. In many cases, the total number of new converts does not translate into proportionate gains in attendance. Many church members drop from church; others are on the move, shopping around for churches. It has frequently been observed that a parade of people come into the church through the “front door” but drift out the “backdoor.” The rate of attrition causes many pastors to lose spiritual impetus.

A twofold problem exists. First, there is a failure to assimilate new converts. Second, current believers are failing to remain faithful in their church attendance. Sadly, most pastors have been taught evangelism but not assimilation (how to preserve the “front door” fruit) and discipleship (how to mature believers in the faith).

The project focuses on assisting shepherd leaders in developing leadership skills and qualities to more effectively attract, assimilate, disciple, and retain people in their congregations. To get a clearer understanding of the role of pastors as leaders in relationship to the retention of members through vital and systematic assimilation and discipleship programs, input was sought through field survey and seminars. The results from the survey and seminars substantiate the need for training pastors and church leaders in basic leadership skills.

By-products of this study may occur: (1) pastors will become more effective shepherds of their congregations, especially in the throes of a vastly changing society; (2) pastors will enhance their leadership skills and be able to give their members better direction, by developing vision and values for themselves and their congregations and by becoming people of influence; (3) pastors will place as much value on the maturity of members as they do on numerical growth; (4) churches will experience more steady growth; and (5) the instruments and strategies developed can be used by other churches to enhance their effectiveness in leadership, as well as assimilation and discipleship programs.