

**THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN
MISSIONS: A HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST LOCAL CHURCH
MISSIONS IN NGWA COMMUNITY OF ABIA
STATE**

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Abstract

In the study of Missions, local churches are referred to as either "sending churches" or "receiving churches." Sending churches are the home country churches which send and support missionaries, receiving churches are the churches planted on the field as a result of missionary work. The missionary's job is not complete until there is a viable local church established which is able to grow and reproduce itself. In reaching this point, effective missionaries follow the Biblical pattern which

is threefold; first, evangelism; second, training disciples; third, establishing the leadership and forming a new local church. The new church is the receiving church.

This study focuses on the historical role of the Seventh-day Adventist local church missions in the Ngwa community by evaluating their impacts, challenges, and influence on the growth of Christianity and community development in the region.

Through a historical evaluation of the evangelistic activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Ngwa community of Abia State, the research investigates how the local churches have contributed to evangelistic outreach, education, healthcare, social transformation, and spiritual development within the Ngwa society from the inception of Adventism in the area to this present time. Using the historical research method, data were gathered from archival materials, church records, journals, and relevant literature on Adventist missions in southeast Nigeria. The study reveals that the local church has played a vital role in the missionary expansion through grass root evangelistic efforts, establishment of basic schools and health institutions, community outreach programs, youth development, and moral instructions. In addition, the study reveals that indigenous leadership shaped the contextualization of evangelistic strategies, and activities which encouraged total membership participations hence, the growth and sustainability of Adventist missions in the Ngwa community. The study recommended the local church as the primary agency for Christian mission and community transformation. The

study concludes and maintains that local church participation, leadership training, and contextual mission involvement will improve the impact of Adventist mission in the region. This investigation subsidizes wider discourse on the history of church mission and the significant role being played by the indigenous local churches in modern day Christian mission in Nigeria.

Keywords: Seventh-day Adventist Church; Missions; Ngwa Land; Strategies, contextualization

Introduction

The study considered the prerequisites for a healthy receiving church and a healthy sending church. According to Kenneth C. Fleming, “A vigorous, strong mission church on the field begins with a healthy local church in the home country.” The Biblical role of the sending church is most important if a vigorous receiving church is to be established. You cannot have missions at all without some sort of sending church. Most people think of financial support and women's sewing groups when they think of the part home churches play, but a Biblical perspective will hopefully open up the subject to include more important things than those(43).

Christians are obligated to missionary activities because it is the primary reason for the existence of the church. This obligation is grounded in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, which instructs believers of all times to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, baptize converts, and teach obedience to God's commandments (Matt. 28.18–20). Beginning from the apostolic era, the local

church has played a significant role in Christian missionary activities. While global church structures conferences and mission agencies offer tactical route and administrative competence, the local church however, remains the operative center of missions. The local congregation remains the driving force for evangelism, discipleship, community service, spiritual care and formation. Thus, the missionary commitment and engagement of local churches and the effectiveness of Christian missions are closely knitted.

Missions remain the central purpose of existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This mission however does not exist in a vacuum. Ron E. M Clouzet posits that a prayerfully thought-through plan for evangelism in the local Church can bring good results and a reasonable harvest of souls (23). The missionary mandate of the church is woven into the fabrics of the local church and serves as the driving force of the church. Nobody is exempted from the mission of the Church, not even young people (Goetz 29). Most recently, the initiatives of the church such as the "I Will Go" strategic plan continue to emphasize total membership involvement in the local congregations and serves as the driving force for evangelism, discipleship, and community service which are the essential components of the church's global mission initiative (McChesney). Contemporary Adventist leaders consistently describe mission as the "heartbeat of the church" and the defining characteristic of Adventist's existence (Boonstra).

Adventist's Theological Basis for Local Church Missions Outreach

Ellen G. White's writings represent the Adventist's theological basis for local church missions outreach. Every church should actively participate in missionary work. According to White, each congregation should serve as a hub for evangelistic outreach. She further reiterated that, "mission is the primary purpose for which the church of Christ on earth was organized" (White15). Local churches serve as training facilities where Christians are prepared to serve their communities in addition to being places of worship dedicated to evangelism and service. They experience spiritual growth and renewal; congregations that disregard missionary participation frequently face spiritual stagnation (White117–25). Her views continue to influence Adventist missiology and offer a crucial foundation for comprehending the role of local churches in mission.

The importance of local congregations in the expansion and viability of Christianity has been confirmed by recent studies. Church growth is intimately linked to contextualized ministry, effective local leadership, and membership involvement, according to studies on congregational development (Šinčala et al351). Scholars have also noted that the success of missionary initiatives frequently hinges on local churches' capacity to contextualize the gospel within indigenous cultural realities in Africa, where Christianity continues to enjoy extraordinary expansion (Masfa 299). According to Wogu, Adventist theology and mission in Africa are more successful when they integrate local cultural circumstances while preserving biblical distinctiveness

(87). The significance of analyzing local church ministry within particular historical and cultural contexts is shown by these remarks.

The growth of Adventism in South-East Nigeria is indicative of a larger trend in African Christianity, where missionary growth has been largely sustained by indigenous participation. The success of Christian missions in South-East Nigeria was frequently associated with educational institutions, medical ministries, the dissemination of literature, and the slow rise of indigenous leadership, according to historical studies of these missions (Nnatuanya52–58). In a similar vein, Adventist missions' efforts in Nigeria included medical and educational ministries as crucial tools for community transformation and evangelism. The church's acceptability among the local populace was greatly aided by the construction of mission schools, clinics, and hospitals (Eregare). The example includes projects like the Okpualangwa Hospital project, which was created in the 1960s, through the cooperation between local authorities and the South East Nigerian Mission. Adventist medical activity significantly expanded into the Ngwa area and endeared the people to the church hence, acceptance is enhanced. This institution served thousands of patients and demonstrated the church's commitment to holistic missions.

Historical Assessment of Seventh-Day Adventist Local Church Missions in Ngwa community of Abia State

This study conducts a historical assessment of Seventh-day Adventist local church missions in Ngwa community of Abia State. It evaluates local church missionary activities' contributions to evangelism, discipleship, church growth, and community transformation while looking at their beginnings, development, strategies, successes, and difficulties. The study aims to add to the expanding body of knowledge on Adventist missiology, African church history, and local church missions by drawing on denominational archives, conference records, oral interviews, and pertinent academic literature. It also emphasizes how important local congregations are as catalysts for social change and spiritual rejuvenation both inside and outside of the Ngwa community.

The local congregation has historically been the main vehicle for evangelism, discipleship, community involvement, and spiritual transformation within the Christian church. The local church plays a crucial role in carrying out the gospel commission in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) tradition through proclamation, service, and believer nurturing. Local churches have made substantial contributions to community development, education, healthcare, and church growth throughout Africa, especially in Nigeria. According to recent research, the engagement and dedication of local church leaders and members are crucial to the viability and efficacy of Adventist mission (Nwaomah71–91.; Nembudani 1772–1784.).

Despite the Seventh-day Adventist Church's impressive growth in Nigeria, there is still a dearth of historical

records and academic analysis about the part local congregations play in maintaining grassroots missionary work. While the contributions of local churches in particular areas have gotten relatively little attention, a large portion of the material now in publication concentrates on denominational growth, administrative systems, or the activities of pioneer missionaries. Studies pertaining to the Ngwa community in Abia State, where Adventist churches have been around for a number of decades and have taken part in community service, church planting, evangelistic outreach, and educational activities, show this disparity.

Over the years, the Ngwa community has experienced significant social, economic, cultural, and religious transformations. The opportunities and difficulties local church missions face have been impacted by these changes. Concerns about the sustainability of evangelistic efforts, membership retention, youth involvement, discipleship, and the maintenance of mission-focused church identity persist despite the fact that Adventist churches in the region have had periods of growth and development. Despite successful evangelistic campaigns, churches often struggle to retain converts and maintain long-term mission effectiveness, according to recent studies on Adventist mission in Africa (Nwaomah71–91).

Additionally, new research has emphasized the necessity for local churches to shift from a limited conception of missions to comprehensive community transformation. According to research on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria, many churches still struggle to strike

a balance between evangelistic proclamation and significant community development and social engagement (Swart and Efuntade 230–251). In a similar vein, research on Adventist mission in Africa has highlighted the need for contextualized and indigenous methodologies that enable local congregations to meet community realities while adhering to denominational and biblical mission goals (Masfa 292–316.; Nembudani 71–91).

As a result, little is known about the history, successes, difficulties, and general efficacy of Seventh-day Adventist local church missions in Ngwa community of Abia state. Important lessons from previous mission experiences could be lost without such an assessment, and modern missions' designs might not be able to take advantage of historical insights. In order to better understand the role of Seventh-day Adventist local churches in mission within the Ngwa community, this study will look at their contributions, difficulties, and effects on church expansion and community development. The study also seeks to offer suggestions that could improve local churches' mission efficacy in Ngwa society today and in comparable Nigerian contexts.

Literature Survey

Christian theology and practice continue to revolve around the church's mission. The local church has served as the main means of evangelization, discipleship,

community transformation, and Christian growth since the apostolic era. The local congregation is considered the cornerstone of mission within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, where members actively participate in evangelistic outreach, nurture new converts, and provide community service. Therefore, assessing the development and influence of the Adventist movement in particular cultural and historical contexts requires knowledge of the role of local churches in missions.

The literature on the theology of mission, the local church's involvement in mission, the historical evolution of Seventh-day Adventist mission in Africa and Nigeria, and the role of local Adventist congregations in church and community development are all examined in this overview. Studies that offer information pertinent to the historical assessment of Seventh-day Adventist local church missions in the Ngwa community in Abia State are given special consideration.

The Concept of Mission and the Local Church

The biblical perspective of God's redeeming involvement in the world is where the idea of missions first emerged. Participation in the *Missio Dei*, God's mission through which the church becomes a tool of salvation and transformation, is how modern missiologists define missions. Nembudani claims that while Adventist outreach in Africa is still based on biblical proclamation, discipleship, and preparation for Christ's second coming, it is becoming more aware of the necessity of contextual interaction with African reality (1774-1778).

According to recent studies, the local church is the best organization for carrying out mission since it interacts directly with communities. In addition to being a place of worship, the local congregation functions as a mission outpost where Christians engage in social outreach, evangelism, and discipleship. Researchers contend that active local church involvement in missionary endeavors is more important for long-term church growth than centralized denominational frameworks (Nwaomah71–91).

Additionally, comprehensive mission techniques that combine social reform with evangelistic proclamation are becoming more and more popular among mission researchers. According to this viewpoint, the church can promote social and spiritual rejuvenation. In African communities, where poverty, unemployment, poor education, and healthcare issues necessitate tangible manifestations of Christian witness, this idea is especially pertinent.

The Local Church and Community Transformation

A rising corpus of literature contends that evangelistic proclamation should not be the exclusive focus of mission. Rather, local churches are supposed to support community, economic, and social development. According to Swart and Efuntade's empirical study on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria, many churchgoers are committed to biblical evangelism but also favour more extensive involvement in societal development. The writers come to the conclusion that rather than being competing concerns, evangelism and

transformational development should be seen as complimentary aspects of Christian ministry (230–251).

When assessing Adventist mission in Ngwa communities, this viewpoint has significant ramifications. Local churches have historically functioned as hubs for social support, youth development, health education, and literacy. Consequently, any historical assessment of local church mission must examine not only numerical growth but also contributions to community welfare and social transformation.

Membership Retention and Discipleship in Local Church Mission

Membership retention is one of the recurrent themes in contemporary studies on Adventist missions. Even while many churches are successful in converting new members through evangelistic programs, it is still difficult to keep members committed over the long term.

Nwaomah and colleagues' extensive research in Sub-Saharan Africa shows that local church involvement in membership integration, mentoring, and discipleship is crucial to effective retention. Churches that prioritize baptism without providing sufficient post-baptism care are less likely to retain members than those that offer robust networks of fellowship and chances for involvement.

Nwaomah and Nwaomah's related studies emphasize how crucial membership tracking and church data administration are to retention tactics. According to their

findings, maintaining church development and lowering membership losses are greatly aided by precise records and regular follow-up (71–91).

Because they offer analytical frameworks for assessing the efficacy of local church missions beyond initial evangelical success, these findings are pertinent to the Ngwa setting.

Unaddressed Area in the Literature

Significant scholarly interest in Adventist church missions, church growth, discipleship, and transformational development in Africa and Nigeria is evident in the studied literature. Previous research offers insightful information about the theology of missions, denominational expansion, and issues confronting modern Adventism. However, historical studies that particularly address the role of local Seventh-day Adventist churches in missions within Ngwa communities in Abia State are conspicuously lacking.

The majority of studies that are now available take a continental, national, or denominational viewpoint and seldom look into the long-term contributions that specific local churches made to evangelism, church planting, discipleship, education, and community development. Oral testimonies from pioneer Adventist members in Ngwa territory, conference archives, and local church documents have all been used sparingly. This disparity calls for a historical analysis of Seventh-day Adventist local church missions in the Ngwa

community to preserve historical knowledge and provide lessons for contemporary mission practice.

Lastly, the literature shows that, in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, the local church continues to be the major agent of missions. In order to achieve sustainable mission objectives, recent research highlights the significance of evangelism, discipleship, membership retention, and community transformation. Research on Adventism in Nigeria and Africa shows impressive church expansion while also pointing out issues that call for increased local church involvement. However, the historical achievements of Adventist local churches in Ngwa area continue to receive insufficient scholarly attention. Thus, by offering a historical assessment of Seventh-day Adventist local church missions in the Ngwa community in Abia State, this study aims to close that gap.

The Missionary Role of the Seventh-Day Adventist Local Church in Ngwa Communities

In Ngwa communities, Abia State, the local Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church plays a crucial role in carrying out the church's mission mandate. The local church is the main organization for evangelism, discipleship, community reform, and spiritual nurturing since it is the grassroots manifestation of the global Adventist movement. Every local congregation is a missionary group tasked with sharing the everlasting gospel and preparing people for Christ's second coming, according to the Adventist mission concept. The church's primary duty, according to the Seventh-day Adventist Church's

mission statement, is to make disciples and give testimony.

Through church planting, public evangelism, Sabbath School outreach, and the upbringing of new converts, local churches in Ngwa communities have historically aided in the growth of Adventism in the area. Local congregations have served as hubs for missionary outreach and spiritual development among the Ngwa people since Adventist activity was established in Aba in 1923. The active involvement of local church members in evangelistic endeavours and community engagement has been a major factor in the swift expansion of Adventist membership in Abia State.

Additionally, the local church has a big impact on member retention and discipleship. Members are prepared for Christian service and mission through Sabbath School classes, Bible study groups, prayer gatherings, and youth ministries. According to McChesney, current Adventist mission strategies stress that church growth should be centered not only on baptismal statistics but also on believers' spiritual development and participation in missionary endeavours.

The local churches in Ngwa communities also play a significant role in social ministry and community development. Adventist churches participate in humanitarian efforts, visitation ministries, social services, and health education initiatives. By attending to both spiritual and physical needs, these acts exemplify Christ's approach to ministry. Health ministry continues to be a unique aspect of Adventist outreach, offering

chances for evangelical influence and community engagement.

Additionally, local churches provide training grounds for indigenous leaders. Within the local church structure, lay evangelists, deacons, youth leaders, leaders of women's ministries, and elders are trained to be active members of the mission. Local church members are purposefully empowered by the Adventist organizational structure to support evangelism and discipleship in their communities (Ron E. M Clouzet²³).

Several areas of Ngwa communities had Adventist congregations by the 1930s and 1940s. The mission encompassed social assistance and education in addition to evangelical preaching. Many families who wanted their children to have a Western education were drawn to the schools founded by Adventist missionaries. These establishments developed into hubs for religious education and leadership training, creating future pastors, educators, and church leaders who would subsequently increase the Adventist presence throughout Abia State (Njoku, 55–60).

The 8 Roles of the local Church Mission

Those characteristics which marked the healthy church in Antioch were to mark the newly planted churches in any communities in any part of the world. We noticed that in Antioch those characteristics included growth, teaching, concern, order, leadership and spirituality. The cultural externals might vary a great deal between one place and another. Things like language, music, dress,

social order and customs are different in every cultural unit. Paul and Barnabas were not to reproduce the cultural aspects of the church in Antioch, but the spiritual aspects. It was in the spiritual things that Antioch was the pattern.

1. The Local Church is the Result of Missionary Effort

The simple fact of the existence of any church tells that someone, sometime, went out of his way to establish it. In a very real sense, every local church is the result of missionary activity. If other people even in a past generation had the zeal to establish your local church, then present members should not allow it to become sterile and unproductive. Every healthy church should seek to reproduce itself. Whether this is in the home country or a foreign country is merely a matter of distance. All living organisms exist to reproduce themselves. The spiritual organism of the local church is no exception.

2. The Local Church is a Scout for Missionary Recruits

The New Testament church will be actively looking for the kind of men and women whom God can use in missions. To follow the example of Antioch there must be an active search for such persons. The elders there were the ones who were sensitive to the Spirit's call and were told by the Spirit to separate Barnabas and Paul for missionary work. Too often this pattern is reversed today when those with a burden for doing missionary work

share this burden with elders who have never before given thought to the possibility. Local assembly leaders should be prayerfully considering those in the fellowship whom God may want for some special ministry. Then having some in mind, they should be praying with them about it (Hartman 11).

It is the place of elders to actively counsel with young people in this regard and to give guidance concerning further training and steps toward its fulfillment. Leaders like this will go out of their way to learn of needs and opportunities. Unfortunately this is a rare thing. Keen young people are all too often discouraged by local church leaders who have little world vision themselves, or, if they do, fail to pass it on. These potential candidates will then, in all likelihood, take steps themselves. If those steps lead them in directions which elders later find are not to their liking, they have only themselves to blame. Their interest and counsel is at the heart of God's plan for the church and missions. May God give us leaders who are keen-sighted, world-oriented and scouting for the cause of world missions.

3. The Local Church is a School for Missionary Apprenticeship

There is no better school for the training of missionaries than the local church. It is largely because the local church has failed to do its job that other means for training are sought. Ideally, converts should be discipled within the scope of the local church. They should be

given responsibilities in all the varied aspects of the local assembly and learn through the apprenticeship method (discipleship training) all the different functions. Elders should be taking younger men with them in pastoral work, in evangelism, giving them room to develop their gifts. They should be encouraging them in worship and prayer. They should be showing them how to disciple others and study effectively the Word of God. Every godly person in the local assembly should be a Paul training Timothy, both men and women.

Of course, there may well be a place for specialized training that schools can provide, and the alert elder will know of these and suggest them. But the school will never be able to provide everything the church can give. One note of encouragement is that the local church does not have to be perfect in order to be effective. There are some ways in which the less than ideal assembly will provide wonderful, character-building opportunities for the potential missionary.

4. The Local Church is a Library of Missionary Information

Your assembly ought to have available mission periodicals that give fresh information on current missionary activity. Handbooks of prayer lists of missionaries ought to be distributed. The local church library should most certainly have some of the many missionary biographies available. God has used these over the years to challenge hundreds toward a career of missions. Some excellent ones are THROUGH GATES

of SPLENDOR, PEACE CHILD, FROM THE HANDS OF THE WICKED, but there are dozens more.

Letters from missionaries should be read to the church so that interest will be maintained. Missionaries themselves should be actively encouraged to come and report on the work God is doing through them. There is little excuse for anyone who has spent a few years in the fellowship of a local church not to be well informed on present day missions.

5. The Local Church is a Power Station for Missionary Prayer

This matter of prayer could hardly be over-emphasized. One of the chief matters for earnest prayer ought to be the lost world. It is a healthy exercise to compare the role of prayer in the early church as recorded in Acts, with the place it occupies in the local churches in this country. Almost every chapter of Acts speaks of prayer. The fire that marked the early apostles was fueled by prayer.

Every prayer meeting ought to be studded with fresh information about which the believers can pray specifically. Most of God's people completely miss so much that is happening in so many different places.

6. The Local Church is a Treasury for Missionary Funds

God entrusts to each local church fund for use in the spread of the Gospel. Leaders should be concerned that

they use this privilege wisely; it most certainly will include missionary giving. Care should be taken as to how and where money is sent. The local church ought to support those missionaries who are most closely following the pattern of the New Testament. Not every well-produced brochure with a plea for funds needs to be answered with a check from the assembly. Some of the quietest and least vocal of missionaries are involved in wonderful work for God. Healthy assemblies will know some of these and direct assembly funds to them. We are living in a culture which is strongly influenced by slick advertising methods. Too much of this technique has invaded Christian and even missionary circles. Be wise in the use of the Lord's money. Remember that giving through the local church is the primary New Testament pattern

7. The Local Church is a Board Room for Missionary Strategy

Serious elders in the local church should be taking time to consider their parts in God's plan for world evangelism. Then they ought to be taking steps to fulfill the responsibility. If so, they will be seeking God's face-as-to-whom they might send, and where and for what purpose. They will be actively training younger people. They will be leading the local church in prayer and giving for missions. They will be expanding the: work in the home country as well, and other local assemblies will deliberately be planted Just as parents plan careers for their children and guide them toward fulfillment, so the overseers will be doing for the flock over which God has given them charge.

8. The Local Church is a Commissioning Body for New Missionaries

When the prospective workers are prepared, and when the assembly is ready, the time has come for the new workers to be sent forth. By this time the assembly has full confidence in the new missionaries because they have had an extended period of working together. Also the workers will have confidence in the wisdom and direction of the assembly. Just as in the case of Paul and Barnabas when they were commended from Antioch, so it will be when the local church today commends prepared workers for a work which God will bless.

Where close church/missionary relations are maintained there will be continued mutual interest. The workers will be assured of the support at the throne of Grace, no matter what trials and difficulties come their way. These can be shared without embarrassment because people have a true prayerful concern and love. Undoubtedly the local church will want to use some of its funds to minister to the missionaries from time to time, then, too, it may be well for someone from the local church to personally visit the missionaries on the field and bring back a firsthand account of what God is doing there. In all these ways and others, there will be continuing interest in the home church. This is as it should be.

In conclusion, we state again that the role of the local church in God's plan for missions is central and vital. If missions are lagging behind, then the fault probably lies in the local church. If organizations are taking over where the church ought to be motioning, let us not

criticize the organization, but revitalize the church and establish its Biblical role (Fleming 44-49).

Missionary Strategies of the Seventh-day Adventist Local Church in Ngwa Communities

Local Seventh-day Adventist churches in Ngwa Land use missionary tactics that take into account both local contextual factors and global Adventist mission goals. Public evangelism is one of the best tactics. Local churches continue to use evangelistic campaigns, revival gatherings, prophecy seminars, and crusades to share Adventist doctrine and encourage people to dedicate their lives to Christ. These initiatives frequently result in the founding of new churches and baptisms.

Total Membership Involvement (TMI) is a second tactic. Instead of leaving evangelism to pastors alone, TMI, a global outreach program, invites all church members to actively engage in mission activity. The approach places a strong emphasis on community involvement, visitation, friendship evangelism, and personal witnessing. The Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan further reinforces the principle that every believer is a missionary.

Small-group ministry is another crucial missionary tactic in Ngwa communities. To promote outreach and discipleship, local churches set up home-based worship centers, neighborhood Bible study societies, and prayer groups. Small groups give families and communities the

chance for intimate companionship, leadership development, and contextual evangelism.

One important aspect of Adventist mission is still literature evangelism. In neighborhoods, schools, marketplaces, and houses, churchgoers hand out pamphlets, periodicals, health publications, and Bible study aids. According to recent research, literature ministry is still a successful way to introduce people to biblical concepts and spark their interest in learning more about the Bible (Silalahi, Sagala, and Hendriks).

Health ministry is another evangelistic tactic used by the local churches in Ngwa communities. While addressing urgent health issues, medical outreach, health lectures, blood pressure checks, wellness seminars, and lifestyle education programs foster beneficial ties with community people. The Adventist concept of holistic mission, which integrates mental, spiritual, and physical well-being, is reflected in health ministry.

Digital evangelism has become a new missionary tactic in recent years. To reach a larger audience, local churches are increasingly using digital literature distribution, live streamed worship services, online Bible studies, social media platforms, and WhatsApp groups. To maximize outreach efficacy, the Adventist Church's modern mission paradigm promotes the combination of digital and physical evangelistic techniques.

Youth engagement and a family-centered mission are two other tactics. The involvement of families, children, youth, and young adults in evangelism and discipleship

is emphasized in recent Adventist mission programs. Local churches encourage family-based evangelism while fostering a missionary attitude in younger generations through Adventist Youth Ministries, Pathfinder clubs, Ambassadors, and Adventist Possibility Ministries.

Lastly, indigenous leadership development and church planting continue to be crucial missionary tactics in Ngwa communities. Local churches find unreached areas, develop new congregations, and educate lay evangelists. The primary means of carrying out the mission in Ngwa communities is still the local Seventh-day Adventist church. Local churches continue to further the church's mission through evangelism, discipleship, health ministry, literature distribution, community service, digital outreach, youth engagement, and church planting.

Healthy Local Church Missions Characteristics—Antioch Church Example

It was a *growing church*. Twice we read of this in Acts 11:20-26. Verse 21 says, 'the hand of the Lord was with them and a large number who believed, turned to the Lord.' Again in verse 24 it says, "And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord" Growth indicates health.

It was a *teaching church*. Not only were people saved, but they were taught the truth of the Word of God and trained to obey it. Barnabas encouraged them "with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord" (vs. 23). Both

he and Paul "*taught* considerable numbers; and the *disciples* were first called Christians at Antioch" (vs. 26).

It was a *concerned* church. When they heard that there was to be a famine in Judea, they responded by collecting and sending money to the believers there. "And in proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea" (Acts 11:30).

It was a *structured* church. A group of leaders, both prophets and teachers, guided the affairs of the local church and we find them meeting together for this purpose 13:1, 2). Although these men were from different backgrounds, they worked together in harmony to shepherd the flock.

It was *spiritual* church. The elders were praying and fasting as they waited on God.(Acts 13:2, 3) Compare this spiritual exercise with many typical committee meeting today where important matters are decided with only the barest minimum of waiting on God.

Do not miss the connection between the strong healthy church in Antioch and effective missionary outreach which began there. When Paul and Barnabas were leaving to reach out from there to other parts of the world, the emphasis in Acts 13: 1-3 is noton their burden to go, but on the church's burden to send them. As the local church! Were praying and fasting together, they understood the Spirit of God to say, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Sending Church Missions Characteristics – Antioch Church Example

When the leaders perceived the mind of the Spirit of God to choose two from their number for foreign evangelism, they responded in obedience and publicly laid their hands on those whom the Spirit had indicated. The laying on of the hands of the elders was a public sign of the local church's identification with them in the work they were going to do for God. The important thing to notice here is that the local church was central in all of this. It was the church in Antioch which heard the call of God and responded to that call by sending them away (literally "releasing them" for the work to which they were called). Antioch had at this time become a "sending church." The normal Biblical pattern for the local church is that it should grow from a receiving church into a sending church.

At the time that Paul and Barnabas left Antioch, they were "commended to the grace of God for the work" (Acts 14:26). The word "commend" in this verse is also translated "betray," as, for instance, in the case of Judas Iscariot. The idea in both cases is to "give over to another." What the local church at Antioch did was to "hand over" to the grace of God those two men who would not be directly under the authority of the church while they were away. The church would not be able to have close contact with them, so they showed their common concern and support by the act of laying their hands on the missionaries. The simplicity and beauty of this act, as they committed their future pathway to God, is striking. There were no organization, no mission

board, no guarantees, and no pledges—only spiritual men being commended by a spiritual church to accomplish a work for God's glory. It was beautiful in its simplicity.

When Paul and Barnabas set out from the local church in Antioch, they forth knew what God expected them to reproduce. The Antioch church was their model. Having been used of God in the church at Antioch, they knew that it was God's plan that they should seek to reproduce other local churches like it. We are not here tracing the course of their missionary travels, but pointing out that what they did was to plant other local churches like the one they knew at home in Antioch. Antioch was the model of church-planting principles on the mission field.

Challenges of Local Church Missions in Ngwa Communities

The local Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) churches in Ngwa communities have made significant progress in community development, education, evangelism, and discipleship. Nevertheless, local church missions still confront a number of obstacles that limit their efficacy and long-term viability in spite of these achievements. These issues, which stem from socioeconomic, cultural, technological, and religious elements, are both internal and foreign.

Economic difficulty and a lack of funding are two of the biggest issues facing local church missions in Ngwa communities. The ability of churchgoers to financially fund missionary operations has been impacted by

Nigeria's ongoing economic instability, inflation, unemployment, and falling purchasing power. Funding evangelistic efforts, church planting projects, welfare programs, and community outreach initiatives is a challenge for many local churches. Economic difficulties severely restrict missionary growth and sustainability because missionary operations frequently rely on member donations.

Religious diversity and sectarian rivalry present another major obstacle. Numerous Christian denominations, Pentecostal ministries, African Indigenous Churches, and Islamic communities are all present in Ngwa Land. There is fierce competition for converts and church membership as a result of this religious variety. As a result, local Adventist churches frequently face opposition when implementing unique beliefs like health reform, Sabbath observance, and the church's prophetic teachings. Because many people are drawn to churches that prioritize temporal rewards over discipleship and spiritual development, the growing impact of prosperity theology among some Christian groups has made evangelistic efforts much more challenging.

Youth disengagement and membership retention present a third difficulty. Concerns about diminishing youth involvement and retention rates among younger generations are revealed by recent research conducted within the global Adventist Church. Secularization, modernization, social media effects, and shifting cultural ideals put a lot of young people under pressure. These elements frequently erode devotion to spiritual practices, missionary work, and church attendance. According to

the Adventist Church's strategic assessments, active involvement and membership retention are crucial issues that need immediate attention. Stronger discipleship programs and youth-focused ministries are needed, as church surveys have revealed drops in regular attendance and involvement among some members.

The quick development of secular and digital culture presents another difficulty. Communication patterns have changed as digital technology has proliferated, particularly among youth. Digital platforms expose people to secular ideas, false information, and alternative belief systems that could compromise traditional religious commitments, even though they also offer opportunities for mission. Local churches in Ngwa communities frequently lack the staff and technology necessary to effectively maximize digital evangelism. Because of this, many churches find it difficult to connect with younger audiences that depend more and more on online platforms for social interaction and knowledge. The necessity of combining digital outreach with conventional evangelistic techniques has also been stressed in Adventist community conversations.

Another issue is the lack of qualified missionaries. Even if local churches have a large number of devoted members, not all of them have the abilities needed for successful community involvement, leadership, evangelism, and discipleship. The majority of the missionary duties in some churches are carried out by a small number of active members, which leads to fatigue and decreased effectiveness. Local church missions

continue to have serious concerns about the need for ongoing leadership development and capacity building.

Local church missions often face traditional and cultural obstacles. Certain features of traditional beliefs and rituals still have an impact on Ngwa communal life despite the spread of Christianity. Biblical teachings and indigenous cultures can occasionally clash over issues of ancestral worship, traditional festivals, syncretism, and cultural practices. Missionaries and local church leaders must therefore navigate these cultural realities carefully while presenting the gospel in a culturally sensitive manner.

Additionally, new missionary obstacles have been brought about by migration and urbanization. In quest of work and educational opportunities, a large number of young individuals move from rural to urban areas. This trend frequently lowers the number of active volunteers for missionary work and undermines local church membership. Urban areas, on the other hand, offer complicated mission fields with a variety of demographics, necessitating creative approaches to evangelism and discipleship according to the Adventist Mission Strategic Planning.

Prospects of Local Church Missions in Ngwa Communities

Local church missions in Ngwa communities have a bright future despite these obstacles. Numerous advancements in the Adventist Church and society at

large provide substantial chances for mission expansion and efficacy.

A significant opportunity is the execution of the worldwide Adventist strategic project called "I Will Go." At every level of the church, this strategic plan places a strong emphasis on mission participation, leadership development, church growth, discipleship, and total membership involvement. By encouraging all church members to actively engage in evangelism and community service, the program increases local churches' potential for missionary work. The strategic framework acknowledges that church members' active participation in local mission implementation maximizes its effectiveness.

The growing use of digital evangelism is another encouraging development. Local churches now have unparalleled potential to engage a variety of audiences thanks to the increasing availability of smartphones, internet services, and social media platforms. The church's influence can be expanded beyond conventional geographic limits through digital literature distribution, social media evangelism, live streamed worship services, and online Bible studies. Young individuals and urban populations who spend a lot of time online are especially well-suited for digital mission tactics. Digital evangelism is a crucial part of modern ministry, according to recent Adventist mission discussions.

There are also a lot of chances because holistic ministry is becoming more and more important. Public interest in Adventist health ministries, community services,

educational programs, and humanitarian endeavours is still favorable. By addressing physical, emotional, and spiritual needs simultaneously, local churches can build trust and create meaningful opportunities for evangelistic engagement. This integrated approach remains particularly relevant in communities facing health and socio-economic challenges.

Additionally, the Seventh-day Adventist Churches' robust organizational framework offers a strong basis for mission growth. Local congregations continue to receive training, financial assistance, and strategic direction from conferences, unions, and divisions. Local churches are better equipped to carry out their mission when leadership programs, missionary training programs, and church planting initiatives are developed.

Another significant opportunity for the future is youth ministry. The Adventist Church is becoming more and more aware of the value of engaging youth in community service, evangelism, and leadership. Young people are being prepared to take an active role in mission through Pathfinder clubs, Adventist Youth Ministries, Ambassadors, and campus ministries. Maintaining missionary operations while addressing membership retention issues can be achieved through effective youth engagement.

The increasing popularity of community-based mission models presents another opportunity. Instead of just running public evangelistic campaigns, modern mission plans have an emphasis on community transformation, social involvement, and relationship-building. Because

local churches in Ngwa communities are close to the communities they serve, they are in a good position to put these strategies into practice. These contextualized outreach strategies can improve the credibility of the gospel message and fortify ties between the church and the community.

Conclusion

With a focus on the Ngwa communities in Abia State, this study investigated the missionary work of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. The historical analysis showed that indigenous church members who accepted and spread the Adventist message within their communities actively contributed to the expansion and development of Adventist missions in Ngwa communities, in addition to the efforts of foreign missionaries. The local church has continued to be the principal tool for evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, and community transformation ever since Adventist ministry was established in South East Nigeria in the early 20th century (Njoku 87).

According to the report, Ngwa communities' local Adventist churches have made a substantial contribution to public evangelism, church planting, Christian education, health ministry, youth development, book distribution, and humanitarian activities. Through these activities, the church has improved the social and educational conditions of the people it serves in addition to fostering spiritual development (Wilson 95). According to Machesney, the local church has

functioned as a hub for developing believers, educating leaders, and preparing members for missionary work.

The results also showed that the effectiveness of Adventist mission in Ngwa Land has been greatly increased by the missionary tactics used by local churches, such as public evangelistic campaigns, small-group ministries, Total Membership Involvement (TMI), literature evangelism, health outreach, youth ministries, digital evangelism, and community service projects (Trivedi 9986). By using these tactics, the church has been able to remain committed to sharing the gospel while adjusting to shifting societal circumstances (Wilson 117).

But the survey also noted a number of difficulties that local church missions face. Economic limitations, insufficient funding, theological diversity, denominational rivalry, young disengagement, secularization, cultural hurdles, a lack of leadership, and the quick development of digital culture are some of these (Trivedi9987). These difficulties have impacted local churches' ability to maintain missionary growth and successfully retain members.

Local church missions in Ngwa communities have a bright future despite these challenges. A solid basis for future mission expansion is provided by opportunities brought about by digital technology, youth empowerment, community-based evangelism, health ministries, leadership development, and the worldwide Adventist strategic plan, I Will Go (Wilson 126). As a result, the study comes to the conclusion that the local

church is still essential to carrying out the Adventist mission in Ngwa communities. The capacity of local congregations to mobilize members, modify mission tactics to fit modern circumstances, and uphold a comprehensive approach to ministry that attends to both spiritual and social needs will be crucial for sustainable mission expansion (Udoh; Wilson 132).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthening Membership Involvement in Missions

By encouraging each member to actively engage in evangelism, discipleship, visitation, and community outreach initiatives, local churches should step up their implementation of the Total Membership Involvement (TMI) project. Rather than being the sole responsibility of pastors and church officials, mission should be seen as the duty of all church members (Jeffery 9).

Enhanced Funding For Leadership Development

Regular training programs for elders, deacons, youth leaders, Sabbath School instructors, and lay evangelists should be arranged by the Conferences and local congregations. In addition to ensuring continuity in church growth and administration, good leadership development will increase missionary effectiveness (Wilson 118).

Expansion of Digital Evangelism

Digital mission platforms, such as social media evangelism, online Bible studies, live streamed worship services, and digital book distribution, should be funded by local churches (Rodney 21) The church will be able to more successfully contact younger generations and urban areas if members receive training in digital communication abilities (Trivedi. 9986).

Boosting the Youth Ministry

The church should create deliberate initiatives to empower and retain youth. To develop future church leaders and missionaries, Pathfinder groups, Adventist Youth Ministries, Ambassadors, campus ministries, and mentorship programs should be bolstered (Wilson 120).

Encouragement of Holistic Ministry

Local churches should keep incorporating evangelism into community development projects, health ministries, educational programs, and welfare services. The legitimacy and efficacy of gospel proclamation are increased when community members' physical and social needs are met.

Contextualized Mission Approaches

While adhering to biblical principles, mission techniques should be tailored to the cultural realities of Ngwa communities. The church will be able to spread the gospel more successfully and lessen opposition to

missionary endeavours if it has a better understanding of local customs, values, and social structures (Njoku 121).

Increased Funding for the Mission

It is important to urge churchgoers to support mission through specific mission offerings, systematic benevolence, and loyal stewardship of all our being. Additionally, Conferences ought to fund community outreach initiatives, evangelistic efforts, and church planting in underprivileged areas (Wilson 124).

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