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**HOW SELF-DISCLOSURE FACTORS AFFECT INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS AND CHURCH GROWTH: THE STUDY OF
PASTORS AND CONGREGANTS OF CITAM VALLEY ROAD**

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Abstract

Purpose: Interpersonal relationships form a basis for growth in any given social gathering. This entire project is an investigation on how self-disclosure affects interpersonal relationships as a tool for church growth, focusing on members of the congregation and their pastors in CITAM Valley Road. Self-disclosure, which is generally perceived to lead to broken relationships if not well governed within the spheres of a healthy relationship, is unavoidable in any interpersonal relationship. How then does self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships between a pastor and members of the congregation affect church growth?

Methodology: The data was collected through guided face-to-face questionnaires and interviews where it is proved that self-disclosure affects interpersonal relationships which in turn affect church's numerical growth. The researcher focused on qualitative research. The researcher carried out the research at CITAM Valley Road church. The researcher used purposive sampling. The sampling was done across all the departments to ensure the population was represented effectively. The basic or primary data was gathered using the survey questionnaires, given to the CITAM Valley road congregation members. The data collected through the survey questionnaires and interviews was analyzed qualitatively in line with this study's objectives. Data collected from the interviews was analyzed thematically and presented in the form of Brief discussions that were also made on the same while highlighting essential responses.

Findings: The research found out that congregants to a greater extent attend the church only if they have a stronger and healthier interpersonal relationships with their pastors. Pastors also enjoy serving in congregations where they have developed healthy interpersonal relationships. These relationships are greatly affected by self-disclosure.

Unique Contribution to Practice and Policy: Therefore, this study proposes intentional development and nurture of healthy interpersonal relationships through self-disclosure between pastors and congregants, as an effective tool for church growth, and especially to church planters and missionaries. The study recommends structures in the church to help congregants have healthy relationships with their pastors so that they are able to self-disclose without fear.

Key words: *Self-Disclosure, Interpersonal Relationships, Church Growth, Pastors and Congregants*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

As human beings, we are created as social beings and therefore need to relate. We live and exist to connect to other human beings. Genesis 2: 18, "Then the Lord said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." This is the first human relationship in the Bible. God saw it Himself that man could not live alone with the animals and all of God's creation. He was a lonely man. This, therefore, is enough evidence to show no one is created without the need to relate to other human beings.

It is important to consider relationships in the Church as a significant aspect that forms or deforms the Church. The question to ask is if human beings are social beings who need to interact with other human beings, could we have members of our various congregations in our churches, who come to Church seeking to grow spiritually and fulfill their need to find healthy interpersonal relationships? The researcher aims to find out how such relationships affect church growth and especially numerically. Why do we have some churches growing at a faster rate than others? There must be a role that interpersonal relationships play in affecting the growth of the Church. This can be both positive and negative.

In churches experiencing rapid growth in attendance, "it is easy to become a face in the crowd rather than a part in the action...a needy loner rather than a satisfied participant in ministry."¹ Charles Swindoll suggests that a congregant actively involved in service finds more fulfilment than one who sits at the pews, popularly called a seat warmer. Connecting this to interpersonal relationships, an active member is not active by him or herself. Active members form relationships with other members and interact with the church leaders and pastors, building up their interpersonal relationships.

Healthy interpersonal relationships result in a healthy and growing church, and the opposite is true. As pastors and church planters factor in other aspects significant for church growth, interpersonal relationships should be emphasized as this can alter the growth within a short span of time. Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM) emphasizes on small group gatherings called *Safari* groups and encourages members that Church takes place at this small group setting, bringing the focus of every person in the group to unity and togetherness and one accord.² Interpersonal relationships encourage self-disclosure, where the two or more parties keep opening information that concerns them. No one builds a relationship with a stranger. The moment a person begins to form an interpersonal relationship with another, both cease being strangers because they begin to open up information about themselves.

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard: The Value of Open Relationships* (Fullerton Calif: Insight for Living, 1986), 1.

² David Githii, *How to Grow a Healthy and Vibrant Church through Small Church Groups* (Fragrancia Books Publishing House, Nairobi, Kenya, 2008), 49.

Church is built by the people and people must interact and thus we cannot run away from interpersonal relationships as long as we have gatherings. Although the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic have made it difficult to meet physically here in Kenya since March 2020, the Church has still kept social meetings online. Many churches are longing for the full resumption of physical meetings, not just in places of Worship but even in other social gatherings like weddings and other celebration parties.

Wood insists it is important for individuals to share their ideas, thoughts and experiences since these help them to bond more with the person they disclose to.³ Once we get to know deeper or inner details of a person, the more we tend to be closer and have a better relationship with them. On the contrary, many individuals believe that the more one knows a person, the more prone they dislike them or become bored to continue with the relationship.

It is noted that as times move on, Christians in this millennial age may fear to open up to their pastors. Still, as Argyle argues, "a healthy interpersonal relationship is marked by an appropriate balance of self-disclosure and feedback within any given relationship."⁴ Sharing of personal information should attract more sharing of personal information if there is trust.

Self-disclosure and opening up is encouraged in the James 5:16, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."⁵ This in itself encourages interpersonal relationships and therefore, members of the Church, Pastors, and all leaders should encourage their congregations to build healthy interpersonal relationships, but on the other hand, watch out, lest it becomes the genesis of division and hate in the Church. Notably, "there is overlap between the working areas of the professional psychotherapist or counsellor and those of the pastor."⁶

The Catholics are known for the practice of confession between members of a church and their priest, but the confidentiality in the process encourages many more to open up.⁷ A Catholic friend agreed that one primary reason he keeps on confessing and disclosing their information to their priests is the assurance of confidentiality.

Statement of the Problem

As seen earlier, human beings need to interact with other human beings. However, there is a likelihood of changes in the relationship as they keep peeling the onion of knowing each other. This is why psychologists have argued that the more a person knows the other, the more they may dislike them if not like them the more. In my ministry engagements, I have met dormant Christians who dislike social interactions, interpersonal relationships in the Church, and prefer attending a service and not participating because they do not want to be known. In other words, they are hiding from pastors and from other congregants. They are not interested in peeling other people's onions and not being concerned about peeling their own to others. Individuals may shy away from

³ Ibid., 36.

⁴ Michael Argyle, *Sociometry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 28.

⁵ Mich.) Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, *Holy Bible: New International Version.*, 2018).

⁶ Skinner Sue Walrond, *Family Matters: The Pastoral Care of Personal Relationships* (London: S.P.C.K, 1988), 125.

⁷ "How to Go to Confession," *About Catholics*, April 8, 2012, accessed April 13, 2019, <http://www.aboutcatholics.com/beliefs/how-to-go-to-confession/>.

disclosing their information to their friends and family members as well the clergy, in fear of rejection, termination of relationships or even societal discrimination.

Healthy interpersonal relationships mean a healthy church.⁸ Therefore, David Githii writes to help church planters, pastors, and church leaders develop healthy relationships in groups to grow churches. It is agreeable that interpersonal relationships affect church growth positively or negatively. Many churches have been destroyed due to bad interpersonal relationships. Self-disclosure is a cyclical process. The initial discloser self-discloses, the receiver responds, and the initial discloser analyses the response. The receiver's understanding and response to the disclosure are crucial facets of the procedure. The receiver's interpretation of the origin of the disclosure, which can involve relational, contextual, and behavioral attributions, accounts for a portion of the answer. There is probably to be a stronger sense of emotional intimacy and personality as the disclosure period goes well for the discloser. This Study, therefore, seeks to determine how self-disclosure affects such interpersonal relationships, which are essential for the growth of the Church, focusing on pastors, leaders, and members of the congregation at CITAM Valley Road, the oldest CITAM assembly with rich diversity of congregants, leaders, and pastors.⁹

Objectives

The objectives to be met in this research include the following:

- i. To evaluate and show how self-disclosure affects interpersonal relationships and social interactions for church growth.
- ii. To find out what factors encourage and establish disclosure to boost good interpersonal relationships for positive church growth.
- iii. To determine the factors that discourage self-disclosure between pastors and congregants in the Church, thus hindering interpersonal relationships.
- iv. To evaluate the role of the pastors and church members in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships for church growth numerically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social-Penetration Theory

The Social penetration theory was developed to help us understand how interpersonal relationships and self-disclosure works, and it was developed in 1973.¹⁰ It talks about how relational closeness is developed and how we can develop deeper intimacy in our relationships, through mutual self-disclosure, so that both parties feel moving in the same direction.¹¹ Using the example of the onion, the theory shows how we peel an onion layer after layer, discovering something new as we get deeper and deeper into a relationship. Therefore self-disclosing should not be from congregants to pastors alone but also from pastor to congregant. As congregants disclose to another or the pastors, it should be a way to strengthen the relationship because we can only be closer to those we know. It is

⁸ Githii, *How to Grow a Healthy and Vibrant Church through Small Church Groups*, 282–283.

⁹ "CITAM - Christ Is the Answer Ministries," *CITAM - Christ Is the Answer Ministries - Just Another WordPress Site*, accessed January 9, 2020, <http://www.citam.org>.

¹⁰ Altman and Taylor, *Social Penetration Theory: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*, 28–36.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 29.

impossible to have an interpersonal relationship with a stranger. Let's see then the stages of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships.

Stages of Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure happens in different stages of an interpersonal relationship. Atman and Taylor share six stages upon which sharing personal information and self-disclosure takes place, as shown below.¹²

a) **Orientation stage-** The first stage is called the orientation stage, and it is the introductory part, where the relationship is new. People only share general facts about themselves and are interested to know general facts about their partners. It involves the physical aspects and the presentation styles of a person. The pastor may therefore know few facts about the surname, profession, locality of the congregant. The congregant also knows few facts about the pastor like the pastor's wife and children, the pastor's car and maybe familiar with the pastor's office location.

b) **Exploratory stage-** In this second stage, people involved want to know each other more and are seeking to see whether their interpersonal relationship can work or not. They disclose information aimed at bringing them to a commonality. A member of the congregation might therefore share what I call, 'did you know' information. This is to say they are looking for acceptance with common information like, 'did you know I also like going for weekly prayers at Karura forest?' They begin to share their likes and dislikes to see whether the pastors would develop a better relationship with them, should they share similar likes and dislikes. If they have similarities, their interpersonal relationship grows and the desire to know each party grows.

c) **Affective stage-** At this stage, self-disclosure grows more and issues that affect one person affects also the other. It is a stage where things are 'ours' and not 'mine' or 'yours.' Parties involved do not fear to disclose private information, as they have already established a bond. This is the stage when a congregant can now prefer to be counseled by a certain pastor and not the other, since they have developed a liking for that particular pastor. Such congregants can now boast to know the pastors better and are proud to be closer to the pastor than other congregants. The pastor is at ease with such a person and knows them well and therefore has also developed affection or liking towards them.

d) **Stable stage-** It is at this stage that the relationships have now become part of someone's life. This is to say that both parties cannot do without their partners. Confidence and trust have developed and therefore both can share in regards to anything. The relationship is at its peak. For the congregant, they have known the pastor for some time and therefore can feel free to share their burdens and deeper struggles even with sin, since they trust and have confidence in their pastor. At this stage, the pastors may feel attached to the members and may also share their struggles in ministry and other challenges since the person has proved to be a friend. Notably, most pastors do not get to this stage with most congregants because of the fear of vulnerability. Maybe they would get to this stage with their fellow pastors.

e) **Depenetration stage-** This is the stage that people begin to shy away from each other. The stage becomes the goodbye stage without an assurance of coming back. Parties involved feel the need to move on with their life, as they have probably or most likely achieved whatever they seek to achieve

¹² Altman and Taylor, *Social Penetration Theory: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*.

from the relationship. If it is in the case for married people, it is the stage they feel challenges are more than rewards and seek to divorce. People forget their friends and discover after some time that they stopped communicating and the relationship easily dies for other ordinary relationships. Some relationships may start from stage one all over after a period of time. Congregants feel known too much and often the desire to transfer to another church happens at this stage. For most pastors, there is a need to be in another church if not to know other members of the congregation.

Disclosure-feedback ratio

Luft and Inghan argue that when friends begin to share their private information and provide feedback to one another, the relationship they share is likely to evolve into a stronger relationship. If their disclosures and feedback move to a much deeper level, they are likely to become more intimate.¹³ Therefore, a congregant may be closer to a pastor through self-disclosure although generally the pastor may not feel too close to the congregant. More than the congregant, the pastor is careful with interactions to maintain high levels of stability and mutual respect.

A healthy relationship between parties shows evidence in a balance between disclosing and when not to reveal which involves sharing biological data, feelings and one's ideas and thoughts, unknown to another person and sharing of feedback within that relationship.¹⁴ Feedback should offer affirmation to both the pastor and the congregant, and therefore deepen their interpersonal relationship. Any stable relationship should therefore balance between self-disclosure and feedback. A pastor in this case, ought to affirm the congregant of their trust and confidentiality throughout the process. Let us, therefore, explore the pastor's role in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships through self-disclosure.

The Pastor's Role

Certainly, the pastor has a role in ensuring that the congregation's needs are met spiritually and by extension, wholesomely. Pastoral calling is God's gift for the called to serve others.¹⁵ This means that the pastor carries the spiritual needs of others and serves them in a manner best to his or her ability, and by so doing offers himself or herself as a servant of the people of God. The pastoral calling goes beyond a professional career to connecting with God's people in joy and maintaining healthy relationships with the people.¹⁶ In John 15:15, Jesus befriends all people, including sinners and pastors who are ready to grow their churches must embark to grow friendships that will propel such growth.¹⁷ They must do this through communication and care from the people they lead, with attention to active listening, which is part of healthy interpersonal communication skills.¹⁸ The call to be a pastor is branded a "dangerous calling" because it is demanding and unique in its nature of

¹³ Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, *The Johari Window: A Graphic Model of Interpersonal Awareness* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1955), 38–44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵ Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1964), 3.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broad man & Holman, 2003), xii–xiii.

¹⁷ David Hansen, *the Art of Pastoring: Ministry without All the Answers*, Revised ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2012), 130–131.

¹⁸ Joseph Earl Bush, *Gentle Shepherding: Pastoral Ethics and Leadership* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2006), 62–63.

operation.¹⁹ Although not proven, people associate a growing church to the pastoral leadership and vice versa. Pastoral office is therefore key in any church as it presents the face of the ministry. The Study assessed the roles of pastors in ministry but did not evaluate roles the pastors and congregants have in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships for numerical church growth, which is a current study aim.

Pastors have a role in enhancing family care by offering counseling services, and therefore they play the role of a pastor and the role of a therapist.²⁰ Pastors can never run away from interpersonal relationships. Therefore, as families share to seek help, they are prone to disclose their private information. Pastors are mandated to maintain their pastoral image even in the process but not shy away from acknowledging their own faults in the journey of life.²¹ Jay Adams states that, “admitting mistakes and weaknesses, may lead to improvement and growth in counselling.”²² The pastors should therefore also disclose and still maintain their role as shepherds by maintaining the image of the members of the congregation too. As pastors make prayers for others, they are already engaging in interpersonal relationships with the people,²³ and self-disclosure will be at the foundational level or the core of the interpersonal relationship. Pastors work in a social and cultural demographic World²⁴ and they shape both the life of pastors and members of their congregations.²⁵ This Study focused on understanding self-disclosure factors influencing interpersonal relationships but did not evaluate roles the impact of interpersonal relationships towards numerical church growth. The current Study aims at filling the gap.

To maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, confidentiality should be maintained at both ends, but more so by the pastor, because often it is the member of the congregation who opens up to the pastor. The pastor may not share too much deep information but is required to understand the requirements in counselling psychology so that they can build knowledge in counselling, which is grounded on the foundational truth of God’s word.²⁶ People are emotional beings and therefore they should be protected even from their own issues that may cause more harm. My research is an evidence that relationships may change after self-disclosure and further the gap as well as tarnish images of people. This is why Dr. Larry Crabb argues that pastors should take care of people so as to restore the tarnished image and character, mend the broken relationships and not furthering the effect by

¹⁹ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012).

²⁰ Skinner Sue Walrond, *Family Matters: The Pastoral Care of Personal Relationships* (London: S.P.C.K, 1988), 3.

²¹ Ibid. 126.

²² Jay Edward Adams and Jay Edward Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Preachers Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership*, The Jay Adams library (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1974), 213.

²³ Derek Prime, Alistair Begg, and Derek Prime, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 84.

²⁴ Blake J. Neff, *A Pastor’s Guide to Interpersonal Communication: The Other Six Days* (Routledge, 2014).

²⁵ Jackson W. Carroll, *God’s Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2006), 31–33.

²⁶ William T. Kirwan, *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling: A Case for Integrating Psychology and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1984), 14.

pushing off those in psychological needs.²⁷ His Study focused on understanding people and their relationship factors but did not evaluate roles the pastors and congregants have in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships for numerical church growth. The current Study aims at filling the gap.

A Christian counselling professor, Gary Collins, addresses issues considered to be personal and private namely depression, anger, guilt from committing sins, sex outside marriage, homosexuality, self-esteem, drug abuse among others.²⁸ He advises all counselors in general to never record information, whether in writing or using devices in counselling, and should not use it against the person privately or publicly or as a mean of reference. As the pastor seeks to fulfil his or her role in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships and confidentiality, it is important to look at the expectations of interpersonal relationships from both a pastoral perspective and that of the congregants.

Expectations in Interpersonal Relationships

Relationships are prone to expectations. The expectation is one reason relationships start because the parties involved look forward to growth in their social life. As members of the congregation open up, connect, and share their personal information or struggles, such interpersonal engagements are often the expected outcome. Luft and Ingham cluster down into five, and are important to this research as they offer the general expected results of opening up. The two scholars put them into the following:²⁹

- a) **Positiveness**- This is to mean that people often look for relationships where they both enjoy each other's company and feel positive about the other person. If the feeling of positive attitude drops down or stops, the interpersonal relationship may end. When the congregant begins to have negative feelings in the sharing process, he or she may withdraw from their pastor or other congregants.
- b) **Assurance**- It is to mean that people often seek to trust each other, enough to put one's wellbeing in the hands of another person. This is what the congregant does with the pastor. They deposit their information to the pastor awaiting direction and help. This trust of their information to the pastors should be protected by the pastor and church counselors to encourage more sharing and self-disclosure. Congregants too, need to protect the information pastors or church counsellors share with them.
- c) **Openness**- People often do look forward to sharing their personal feelings with each other. When we share our personal feelings, attitudes, and experiences, we develop openness in our interpersonal relationships. For the congregant member to share, there has to be openness with the pastor or the shepherd. Self-disclosure cannot happen in a relationship struggling with openness.
- d) **Networking**- This means that there should be a high level of commitment from both parties in any given relationship, not just to each other, but also to each other's friends and family. A good friend gets referrals which the existing friend does. People speak well of their trusted friends to others. Congregations who make friends with their pastors and church counselors speak well of them and therefore attract more and more congregants into the Church.

²⁷ Lawrence J. Crabb, *Understanding People: Deep Longings for Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1987).

²⁸ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 168.

²⁹ Luft and Ingham, *the Johari Window: A Graphic Model of Interpersonal Awareness*, 96.

- e) **Task sharing** means that friends often help each other with work; at home, people help each other do the household chores; others in business and investment, and other duties. Self-disclosure is task sharing as the congregant shares on an issue to both participate with the pastor in finding help. This agrees with Rosenberg who argues that sharing information is becoming part of the object and therefore, the involvement has a high potential to change our appearance and make our interpersonal relationships more meaningful and colorful.³⁰ It is important also to note that task sharing is part of minor group roles and at task-sharing level people grow each other even on matters spiritual and exchanging ideas from one another.³¹ Congregants and pastors share a task in developing each other through maintaining a healthy and fulfilling interpersonal relationship where both parties enjoy its fruits and walk through its thorns together.

Having seen what self-disclosure is and how it takes place across different stages, and also putting in mind the role of the pastor as the church leader in Church related interpersonal relationships, we shall then seek to understand the role interpersonal relationships plays toward the growth of the Church and what different scholars have said about interpersonal relationships and church growth.

Interpersonal Relationships and Church Growth

Interpersonal relationships have an effect on church growth. This has been observed by scholars and especially missiologists and church planters. Church growth is a wide subject that has been rated second as we shall see the argument that, “discovering the facts of church growth is the second essential principle of church growth thinking, after God’s love for the lost.”³² This means that after thinking of the lost and finding them and coming to Church, we should seek how they will grow and how the Church will multiply and make more disciples. Church growth in itself is important to identify the factors that lead to the growth and those that cause stagnation and eventually death of churches.³³ In this research, the focus of assumption is on self-disclosure factors that influence interpersonal relationships as a tool for church growth.

In 1976, in a dissertation by Flavil Yeakley, speech communication was used as a means of growth for churches. Growing and non-growing churches were compared. It was found that reference of interpersonal relationships and church growth has been a topic of concern over time,³⁴ showing that the reference of interpersonal relationships and church growth has been a topic of concern over time. Comparatively, with the modern development of communication of our day, this should thrive better. Yeakley's research was used as a means to help churches grow by adopting speech communication as a means to enhance connections. This means that our speech communication can act as a catalyst to speed up the church growth when used correctly.

Numerical growth in itself deals with church membership growth, increase in attendance of church services and meetings, which is also reflected in the growth in offerings and tithes, baptisms, baby

³⁰ R.C Rosenberg, *Interaction Appearance Theory and Initial Interactions: A Master’s Thesis* (Texas: University of Texas, 2004).

³¹ Githii, *How to Grow a Healthy and Vibrant Church through Small Church Groups*, 160.

³² Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, eds., *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004), 16.

³³ Ibid. 33.

³⁴ Ibid. 41.

dedications, etc.³⁵ All these aspects are indicators of church growth numerically. The mega Church once had only one or a handful of members.³⁶ Genesis 1:22 shows God blessing the first human creations and charging them to increase and multiply, which is also a blessing given to Noah in Genesis 9:1 and later promised to Abraham that he would increase like the stars of sky. It is, therefore God's plan that His people may increase numerically and fill the earth.³⁷

The argument that supports interpersonal relationships can be summarized into Charles Van Engen statement that, “church growth is based on an evangelistically focused and a missiologically applied theology.”³⁸ Missions and evangelism prosper on interpersonal communication. Interpersonal relationships can therefore make a church grow or not grow. Pastors and church leaders should then give interpersonal relationships significance to draw more reasons to maintain their fellowships and meetings.³⁹ The Study assessed the church growth strategies but did not evaluate self-disclosure factors that influence interpersonal relationships as a tool for church growth, which is the current study aim.

In conclusion, self-disclosure affects our relationships and our relationships affect our attitude towards Church and any place we associate ourselves with. This affects church growth either positively or negatively. In the next chapter, we shall discuss the appropriate research design and methods that the researcher used for this project in the field research to obtain the kind of data searched for by the researcher.

Theological Reflection on Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Relationships

This research was based on the character and nature of Jesus Christ. In preparation for His ministry, Jesus also took time to mentor and disciple the twelve apostles before He could release them for greater numerical growth of the Church. During the preparation period, Jesus self-disclosed His life and even that of His Father to the apostles. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." (ESV) This was a form of disclosure to the apostles. Jesus needed to make known facts about Himself, His Father and the Kingdom of God. As He disclosed, their relationship with the apostles got deeper and more intimate.

From among the twelve, Jesus had yet another more intimate team, which He would do with certain things without the others. Peter, John and James were the only three out of twelve who witnessed the resurrection of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-24, 35-42) as well as the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1,2, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28-29.) They also were farther with Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42.) Furthermore, John seems to have been closer to Jesus as a beloved disciple as seen in John 13:23. This is to show that Jesus took time to self-disclose to the twelve, to the three and even to John at different levels. Their interactions were also different and therefore the assumption that even their interpersonal relationships were on different levels.

By the time Jesus sends them to evangelize as seen in Mark 6:7, Luke 9:1-9, they have already known who Jesus is and what the Kingdom of God is about. By the time of the Great Commission,

³⁵ Ibid. 44.

³⁶ Heward-Mills Dag, *Church Planting* (Parchment House, 2004), 150.

³⁷ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Illinois USA: Crossway, 2013), 210–216.

³⁸ Towns and McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, 123.

³⁹ “Five Principles for Better Relationships in the Church,” accessed January 10, 2020, <http://christianmediations.org/pg12.cfm>.

Jesus had already disciple and developed firm relationships with the apostles and the disciples at large. This way, their numerical growth is evident especially in the book of Acts. For example, in Acts 2:46-47 their numbers kept growing as they met together to pray and to break bread, devoting themselves to the apostles' teachings.

These portions of Scriptures model the effects of self-disclosure on interpersonal relationships and how they affect the numerical growth of the Church. Jesus modelled a perfect example of how developing such relationships can cause numerical growth of the Church. The theological reflection helped the researcher form a basis of the research with the assumption that self-disclosure and interpersonal relationships are often overlooked if not forgotten as churches talk of evangelism, discipleship, and Church growth. This research therefore seeks to accord self-disclosure and interpersonal relationships the relevance deserved as pastors talk of church plants and growth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The researcher focused on qualitative research. CITAM Valley Road active workers in the congregation filled in the survey questionnaires, which encouraged honesty due to anonymity. The pastors were interviewed to give concrete details which the questionnaires did not capture. Using the qualitative method of research is because it allows the researcher to answer the research questions by interacting with congregants through the questions before the actual filed research was carried out.

Study Area

The researcher carried out the research at CITAM Valley Road church. The Church is located along 28 Valley road, near Kenya's capital city, Nairobi Central Business District (CBD)

Population

There are 500 ministry workers in CITAM Valley Road church. Such members of the congregation interact more with pastors than inactive members and those who simply attend a service and leave without taking any role. Out of the total 9 pastors, 5 were interviewed making it 56% coverage of the pastoral body at CITAM Valley Road church.

Sample Size

The researcher used purposive sampling. The sampling was done across all the departments to ensure the population was represented effectively.⁴⁰ This included 10 active youth members aged 18 years and above, 10 active women in the women's ministry, 10 active men in the men's ministry, 10 members of the international fellowship (Non-Kenyan Citizens) and 10 leaders across different ministries.

Data Collection Instruments

The basic or primary data was gathered using the survey questionnaires, given to the CITAM Valley road congregation members. This was through administering questions that were filled and later studied. The researcher chose survey questionnaires as the instrument of collecting data

⁴⁰ Kombo and Tromp, *Proposal and Thesis Writing*, 82.

because the researcher agrees with the idea that, “self-administered questionnaire is way easier to administer and it allows for greater anonymity.”⁴¹

The advantage of such questionnaires is that it is easier to give and faster to distribute or pass out to a large group of congregants. Interviews comprised of the respondents, for example, the pastors, who offer more than what survey questionnaires may cover. The interviews were recorded to give a framework for factual findings because interviews are the basis for opinions and World-views that shape the results of a research.⁴²

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected through the survey questionnaires and interviews was analyzed qualitatively in line with this study's objectives. The responses from the respondents occurring in different forms was organized, sorted out, classified and coded and through the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer software, the findings were presented through frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs. Data collected from the interviews was analyzed thematically and presented in the form of Brief discussions that were also made on the same while highlighting essential responses.

DATA ANALYSIS

Self-disclosure effects on interpersonal relationships and social interactions

The study assessed self-disclosure effects on interpersonal relationships and social interactions. Interpersonal relationships are important concerning church growth.⁴³ However the ratio of pastors to congregants is great which sometimes makes the persona contact relationships of Pastor and all members hard. Therefore, the pastors actively checking up on members during meetings and commending their work and service will encourage active participation, openness and willingness to serve.

The study revealed that there is an interrelation between self-disclosure and interpersonal relationships which affect church growth. The young people seem to be opening up quickly to the pastors, hence feeling part of the church, which translates into numerical growth. However, adult church members rarely share their private life with some used to share before, but they become uncomfortable sharing their private life disclosure after days. There was a notable aspect that some would disclose when they were youths but after marriage and advancement in age, they choose not to disclose or share their private information with their pastors.

However, occasionally, members share their life privacy to the pastors at clinics and special events in the church. The organization and preparations of ministry events occasionally impact individuals where they are able to open up and share their lives for assistance and discussion with the Pastor.

The study showed that minimal interaction of the members and Pastor concerning private lives is due to their comfortability and confidence in sharing their personal lives. Moreover, people who

⁴¹ Kothari and Garg, *Research Methodology*.

⁴² Geoffrey Walford, *Doing Qualitative Educational Research: A Personal Guide to the Research Process* (London: Continuum, 2001), 82–83.

⁴³ Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, eds., *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004), 16.

are close to the pastors tend to share more than those who are yet to interact personally since they feel the attachment of the bond. The study established that there is variation of self-disclosure among people depending with the age. The young people easily open up in comparison with the people of the advanced age.

The research found that there is doubt in opening up some members to the Pastor since they prospect they can be exposed and experience guilt feeling in their lives, which can draw them away from the church to heal their lives. This feeling may likely result from the feeling of being far from the Pastor and in unreachable position, especially in a case of varying social and financial status since members have different financial standards.

People often doubt the trust issues they can experience sharing with the Pastor. The research identified that some specific fear relations include the feeling of public targeting during sermons and vulnerability to be exposed to others or even personal conscience by their life examples being shared to other people. The results further revealed that members occasionally feel that Pastor often gets tired of carrying the burdens of other people, which makes them avoid disclosing their challenges. Negative attitudes on self-disclosure may result from the tension of judgment or exposure.

Among the benefits noted from the study included build/strengthening one's relationship with the Pastor, closeness and genuine concern from the Pastor, enhancement of friendship and trust, increase of bond and increase in confidence with the ministry. The act of opening up helps create bond with the members since the affected member feels half relieved from the situation they are undergoing. Moreover, members disclose so that the pastors know them, because they believe their relationship will be stronger when they are best known.

The results revealed that members sharing their private life is occasionally done occasionally, which usually happens in forums and ministry events, which revealed that they impact individuals where they are in apposition to open up and share their lives for assistance discussion with the Pastor. The findings further revealed that the limitation that exists of minimal interaction of the members and Pastor concerning private lives is their comfortability and confidence in sharing their personal lives. The common tendency is that people who are close to the pastors tend to share ore than those who are yet to interact at a personal level.

However, there are doubts about opening up of different members to the Pastor since they prospect they can be exposed and experience guilt feeling in their lives, which can draw them away from the church to heal their lives. People often doubt the trust issues they can experience sharing with the Pastor, which includes the feeling of public targeting during sermons and vulnerability to be exposed to others or even personal conscience.⁴⁴ Moreover, some members perceive a feeling that Pastor often gets tired of carrying the burdens of other people, which makes them avoid disclosing their challenges.

Some of the respondents indicated commitment in their relational lives disclosure to their pastors due to the advantages they receive from their discussion with the Pastor. Among the benefits noted by the respondents include building/strengthening one's relationship with the Pastor, closeness and

⁴⁴ Griffin, *a First Look at Communication Theory*.

genuine concern from the Pastor, enhancement of friendship and trust, increase of bond, and increase in confidence with the ministry. Results revealed that one Pastor indicated that the opening up of a member makes them feel exposed and therefore scare them away since they feel vulnerable.

Encouragement factors of self-disclosure

The study revealed that the relationship between Pastor and congregants has a positive influence on their motivation to attend church services. Some of the positive reasons for the interrelationships included prayers and involvement in personal activities, opportunity to serve, accountability, opening up to be helped, sense of personal touch, commitment, and dedication follow-up.

The research further asserted that the opportunity to serve that the members receive due to their relationship with the Pastor and the role they serve to motivate other people towards relating with the Pastor improve their church attendance. On the motivation to self-disclose, there is personal touch and interaction of the members with the Pastor, which encourages the member to attend church.

The research showed that the less satisfying relationship of the Pastor and the congregants discourage some to move to other churches. Depending on the motives of a member, the relationship with the Pastor does not influence their church attendance. Some of the reasons noted in this study are that some consider church attendance a personal relationship with God and not a relationship with the Pastor. The other factor reason for not relying on pastor-member relationship is that the pastors at CITAM keep being shifted and it takes some time to bond the relationship. Moreover, the weak relationship is due to big congregation where the closer congregants keep on attending the church more than the 'hiding' members.

It was further found that the factors that encourage self-disclosure between members and pastors depend on the conduct and dependency of the Pastor. Some of the factors identified include availability, humility, maturity level, credibility of the Pastor and previous accounts by people. The availability and response of the Pastor to facilitate growth of pastor-member relationship is a concern to the members as the primary factor. This takes both way approach, availability of members and Pastor. The study further found that the credibility and personality of the Pastor is a consideration and facilitation factor of self-disclosure. The expected response from the members' perspective towards the Pastor is important in ruling the decision of self-disclosure. The willingness to open of both the Pastor and members is a factor that enhance self-disclosure.

The study asserted the main measure to be taken to improve interpersonal relationships is teaching on the importance of opening up and showing love towards one another, possible through counseling seminars and workshops. Pastors should know basic counselling and psychology skills since somehow congregants will approach them with various issues. The training given to pastors first is important since they are better positioned to develop the relationships between them and the members. It was found that the involvement of member and Pastor fully in the ministry is vital for relational health of the church at large which in turn leads to church growth. The character and attitude development of the pastoral team should be enhanced adequately as it influences the conditions of the relationship of pastor-member.

Self-disclosure should be encouraged for healthy relationships, which will help churches to grow. Not just in numbers but also spiritual matters. Better and strong relationships equal better attendance.⁴⁵ When congregants love their Pastor, they will be happy every time to attend church. If they are not in a good relationship with their pastors, they will hardly attend and even when they do, they will not be active in the church's affairs.

Healthy interpersonal relationships are essential in the growth of the church. Still, they are majorly neglected by congregants for fear of exposure and by pastors because of the very busy schedules doing other things. With a numerically growing church where appointments have to be made it's nearly impossible to have healthy interpersonal relationships between pastors and congregants. However, the numbers breakdown can be handled by forming seminars and forums.

Factors discouraging interpersonal relationship

The results showed that occasionally members fear stigma or exposure on disclosing their lives. Members suspect that what they share with them may be misunderstood and used against them. The members on sharing their lives, they feel that there is insufficient follow-up of their challenges. The pastors are likely to challenge the preaching where pastors use member's examples in pulpits and stigmatization despite not mentioning names.

The findings revealed that the Pastor having a big congregation makes the people have a perception that the Pastor is busy and cannot attend to their need. This makes them to have a friend they can open up to instead. The Pastor at some moments opens up and gives the public some confidence that falling off the way sometimes happens and one just have to accept the situation. In this case, the Pastor sharing his past failure help in creating a familiarity of a possible solution for someone to overcome and regularly members prefer to always open up to anyone who can best familiarize with their situation and the problems and temptations.

The research asserted that pastors have different personalities which create a variety of the perspectives on the approachability of the members for self-disclosure. The friendliness, financial class, societal status and trust are some factors noted down that affect the approachability of pastors. In some instance there are minimal practical help the pastors' offer other than spiritual help, for instance a case where someone is suffering financially.

The research noted that genuineness and confidentiality between the members and pastors are factors in a relationship that promote church growth financially, spiritually, and even in numbers. Relationships create confidence and therefore members are in a position to participate actively in the church's activities. The relationships growth further creates a sense of belonging and therefore the members are confident and comfortable in serving in church.

In a situation where a church has developed interpersonal relationships, there is a basis for people finding a home away from home, which further positively affects the participation of members in church activities. The healthy relationships further encourage love in the church community, promote equal support of the Church work, and helps the members to rally the one mission of the church and thus create a safe environment for the growth of fellowship of brethren.

⁴⁵ Kirwan, *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling*, 14.

The issue of trust and confidentiality is critical. The members must feel that they can trust the Pastor when disclosing issues to them that the pastors will not take advantage of them or share that information with others. A healthy relationship between pastors and congregants means mutual understanding, mutual love, and mutual growth. Relationships affect church growth big time. Any growing church be in numbers or spiritual matters, is one that has healthy relationships between pastors and members. You cannot grow well in a strange environment.

When we talk openly about our issues, even pastors know how best to handle them and teach the congregants. A church can't grow when people are pretending that all is well. And I believe any growing church is one that members and pastors self-disclose their information, including areas of struggles, because the church is like a clinic and no one is holy. We all need to sharpen each other for maximum growth.

Role of pastors and members on church growth

The results revealed that pastors are entrusted with guiding the members in the relationships and serving as role models and mentors in these relationships. The key aspect here is serving as the role models, which serves a stronger influence in the relationships, since the members attend church to be guided by words and actions. The bond in the relationships is more robust because the Pastor is transparent about his past experiences.

The study showed that the role of stimulating the relationships among the members is important and easily conducted by the pastors as the shepherds of the flock. Responsibility and faithfulness in duties should be the right attitude and direction to be taken by pastors. Moreover, prayer works more than daily effort to work out situations. The effort of prayer by pastors is important in the growth of relationships. The responsibilities and actions that are key to Pastor is the conduct of commitment to God and people, love for God, keeping meetings time, hardworking attitude and prayerful life style. The pastors therefore devise strategies that can be helpful in building the relationships

The study found different roles and responsibilities that the members have in their relation to the pastors. The love of members also extends to visiting their pastors. The members' participation actively in the church activities are helpful for church growth and give the pastors an easy time in looking after the flock. Moreover, members can be supportive in church attendance, projects, and initiatives started and initiated in the church. It was further noted that creating small groups and training seminars makes the congregants more open. More pastoral counseling days create rooms for members opening up to be helped.

Pastors have a role in enhancing family care by offering counseling services and therefore they play the role of a pastor and the role of a therapist.⁴⁶ A healthy church is one that is healthy in interpersonal relationships. Have special clinics for counseling members and encourage more ministry out of the office; this means as a pastor, attend weddings, funerals, birthdays, etc.

The role of stimulating the relationships among the members is important and easily conducted by the pastors as the shepherds of the flock.⁴⁷ A pastor is a servant; whom people can reach out to

⁴⁶ Walrond, *Family Matters*, 3.

⁴⁷ Carroll, Jackson W. *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2006.

easily, not one who there is a whole protocol and long one to see him or her. Churches especially church plants flourish on interpersonal relationships. Let all churches seek to have a healthy relationship even with each other by supporting every member's need. Pastors should not have favorites in the church. God did not create a barrier between Pastors and Congregants. According to the book of Acts the pastors are to equip the saints, if this does not happen due to distance between pastors and we the saints, then, growth to the full stature of Christ will not be easily achieved. Pastoral calling is God's gift for the called to serve others.⁴⁸

In the Bible, self-disclosure is seen when saints are encouraged to pray and minister for each other's needs. The sharing, the love, mourning together and celebrating together is all part of self-disclosure. Let members know that this is part of the growth journey. Pastors need to train in psychology also. It will help them know how to handle such issues. Towns noted that "church growth is based on an evangelistically focused and a missiologically applied theology."⁴⁹

Conclusion

Self-disclosure factors affect interpersonal relationships, which in turn affect church growth. The more congregants self-disclose, the deeper their relationship with their pastors gets. Interestingly, those who feel closer to their pastors attend church more than those who do not. Self-disclosure between members and the pastors is generally dependent and can work on two opposite ways of promoting church growth or making members to leave church. The handling of interpersonal relationships is important where the church gains growth momentum. The pastors' and congregants' willingness and trust is the key to growth of healthy interrelationships in the church. The efforts to boost trust of healthy interrelationships is out of the cooperation of both parties. The pastors have the major role in serving as role models and also encouraging members on the importance of opening up and sharing their lives.

Organization and preparations of ministry events occasionally have an impact on individuals where they are in apposition to open up and share their lives for assistance and discussion with the Pastor. People often doubt the trust issues they can experience sharing with the Pastor. The research identified that some specific fear relations include the feeling of public targeting during sermons and vulnerability to be exposed to others. Negative attitudes on self-disclosure may result from tension of judgement or exposure. The benefits of self-disclosure include strengthening relationship amongst the church community, closeness and genuine concern from the Pastor, enhancement of friendship and trust, increase of bond and increase in confidence with the ministry.

On the motivation to self-disclose is personal touch and interaction of the church community and leaders to encourage the members to attend church. This is dependent on the conduct and dependency of the ministers and members trust. Other factors that influence relationships growth include availability, humility, maturity level, credibility of the Pastor and previous accounts by people. The credibility and personality of the Pastor is a consideration and facilitation factor of self-disclosure.

⁴⁸ Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1964), 3.

⁴⁹ Towns and McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, 123.

Different personalities create a variety of perspectives on the approachability among the church community for self-disclosure. The friendliness, financial class, societal status and trust are some factors noted down that affect the approachability of pastors. Genuineness and confidentiality between the members and pastors are factors that promote church growth financially, spiritually, and even in numbers. The healthy relationships further encourage love in the church community, promote equal support of the Church work, and create a safe environment for fellowship growth. Pastors are entrusted with guiding the relationships and serving as role models and mentors in these relationships. Responsibility and faithfulness in the action of duties should be the right attitude and direction to be taken by the whole church community.

Recommendations

The study recommends intensified training of the pastors by the church on the techniques of handling self-disclosure to keep healthy relationships between the lead ministers and the members. Pastors and ministers of the Gospel need to be diligent and careful when handling people's information. Basic counseling courses need to be introduced in seminaries and Bible colleges as mandatory units for every pastor-in-training.

We recommend creating more forums, seminars, and workshops that are facilitators of self-disclosure other than public attendance services. Availability of clinics for personal checking is recommended. Borrowing from CITAM Valley Road, every church can adapt such Spiritual clinics that seem to be connecting pastors and their members more, and where members feel free to share their struggles without the fear of judgment.

The church should also note the importance of healthy interpersonal relationships as a tool for church growth. As reviews are done from time to time, the church must become intentional in establishing more intimate relationships between pastors and members as an evangelism tool and a discipleship tool.

Bible schools and seminaries should make mandatory some counseling psychology courses for all pastors and ministers. This will equip the pastors and ministers with skills of handling self-disclosure and confidentiality among the congregants.

Recommendations for Further Studies.

Due to frequent congregants' movement from one church to another, it would be ideal to conduct research on interpersonal relationships between members alone; and investigate its effects even without the pastors in the picture. Lastly, a theological reflection could be done on interpersonal relations and self-disclosure, with its effects on our relationship to God. It would be important to see whether our interpersonal relationships as human beings affect our relationship with God.

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