



Revitalization of Church Growth in the Midst of the Phenomenon of Church Migration and Elderly Factors

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ABSTRACT

Church growth is one of the important aspects of Christian mission, but many local churches have had challenges in maintaining their congregations. The phenomenon of congregation migration to more attractive churches and the decline in congregation numbers due to aging and mortality pose challenges for local churches in maintaining and growing their congregation. This study aims to analyze the primary causes of congregation migration, the impact of declining numbers due to aging, and church revitalization strategies that can be implemented. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research explores various factors affecting congregation dynamics and provides theological and ecclesiastical solutions. The findings suggest that innovations in ministry, strengthening community bonds, and contextually relevant preaching can serve as solutions for churches in addressing this phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Church growth is one of the important aspects of Christian mission, but many local churches have had challenges in maintaining their congregations. One of the main causes is the phenomenon of moving congregations to other churches which are considered more attractive, both in terms of liturgy, facilities, and more innovative programs. In addition, many churches are facing the fact that their congregations are aging, and the high mortality rate is causing the number of congregations to decrease.

Nowadays, some congregations prefer a more dynamic and interactive liturgy compared to a traditional and monotonous one. Churches that offer variety in liturgy tend to be more appealing to congregations who want a fresher worship experience, Deep, relevant, and applicative teaching in daily life is a major attraction for the congregation. Churches that offer teaching based on God's word with a contextual approach are more in demand, especially by the younger generation. Churches that have friendly service, pay attention to the needs of the congregation, and have a close-knit community are more attractive than churches that do not pay attention to congregation involvement.

The style of music and the use of technology in the church are important elements in worship. Churches with music that are more contemporary and in line with the tastes of younger generations are often more appealing than churches that maintain traditional music. Churches that are able to utilize technology, such as live streaming services, church applications, and digital interaction with the congregation, have their own appeal for modern congregations who are used to the digital era. This phenomenon can be found in various church denominations, both Protestant and Catholic. Studies show that churches that are unable to adapt to the changing times tend to stagnate and even decline in the number of congregations. Meanwhile, churches that offer a more relevant worship experience and have a more modern approach to ministry tend to attract more congregations.

Therefore, it is important to examine the factors that lead to church displacement and the impact of old age on church sustainability, as well as the revitalization strategies that can be implemented to maintain and grow congregation numbers. This article intends to explain the challenges experienced by churches against the phenomenon of moving congregations to other churches and the challenges of decreasing congregations due to the elderly factor. The author will review solutions that churches and congregations can implement to prevent church displacement and encourage congregations to return to the essence of the church: growing, rooting, and bearing fruit in living fellowship, thus producing congregations that have Christlike character and are active in ministry in the local church.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a practical theological approach, which aims to understand and analyze the phenomenon of church displacement and the impact of aging in the context of church growth. Practical theology as a research approach seeks to bridge the gap between theological theory and ecclesiastical practice, thus producing strategies that are applicable to the church in dealing with this challenge. The data collection method used includes literature studies by analyzing contemporary theological sources, academic journals, and books that discuss the growth of the church and the phenomenon of congregational migration. Participatory observation that observes worship practices and patterns of congregational involvement in several churches that experience the phenomenon of congregation movement and churches that have succeeded in maintaining the growth of their congregations.

The collected data are analyzed with a theological hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes the interpretation of ecclesiastical phenomena in the light of biblical principles and the historical understanding of the church. Thus, the results of the research are not only empirical based but also have a strong theological basis in formulating solutions for church revitalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of moving congregations to other churches is not new in church life, there are many factors behind a congregation ultimately deciding to move to another church which ultimately has an impact on the reduction of congregations in one church. Congregational shifts often occur in conventional churches, where congregations switch to charismatic or other denominations. The reason that is often found is that the congregation begins to feel bored with the liturgy of worship that is considered traditional and does not give color in worship. The congregation felt bored with monotonous and less innovative church activities, as well as pastoral preaching styles that were no longer attractive. They are looking for a fresher and more dynamic worship experience.

With so many church options that can be searched and researched through social media, it's now easier for everyone to find the sermon that suits their needs. However, this convenience can have a negative impact if it continues. First, the congregation tends to be a spiritual consumer, thinking of the church only as a personal gratification of needs. Second, congregations lose the opportunity to serve and take root in local churches. Third, the spiritual growth of the church is hampered by a lack of commitment and involvement in the church. The availability of a variety of worship options makes it easier for people to listen to relevant sermons. However, this holds risks. Congregations can get caught up in a consumer mentality, just looking for a church that is 'a good fit' for them. In addition, they lose opportunities to serve, build community, and grow spiritually.

Contextual Liturgical Reform

According to Webber, the church should make liturgical updates to make them more contextual. Music and preaching are two important elements of worship that, when effectively integrated, are capable of producing a profound and transformative worship experience. A blend of contemporary music and relevant preaching can increase congregational engagement and strengthen their bond with God. Contemporary music in worship can serve as an emotional bridge, preparing the hearts of the congregation to receive God's words. The presence of rhythms and melodies that are familiar and relevant to everyday life experiences has the extraordinary power to touch the deepest emotional recesses of the congregation. When the music played has lyrics that reflect the joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments experienced in daily life, this automatically creates a sense of deep connection between the congregation and the ongoing worship. They feel understood, not alone in their life's journey, and that the church they worship in care about the realities of their lives.

Furthermore, once the congregation's hearts are prepared and their emotions are touched through a praise and worship session loaded with contemporary music, the sermons delivered have a stronger and more receptive foundation. The emotional and spiritual foundation that music has built becomes a bridge that connects the personal experience of the congregation with the spiritual messages to be delivered. A wise preacher will take advantage of this moment by referring to the theme or message contained in the songs that have just been sung. By connecting music with God's word, a seamless continuity is created in worship, where one element strengthens and complements the other. This significantly strengthens the congregation's understanding of faith, as they see the relevance of the Bible's teachings to their daily life experiences.

The harmonious integration of music and sermon culminates in helping the congregation to understand the applicative meaning of the worship message. The carefully selected songs serve not only as an introduction or accompaniment, but also as a reinforcement of the key points to be delivered in the sermon. When the congregation hears the lyrics of a song that aligns with the message they have just heard or will hear, the message becomes easier to remember and permeate. Music has the power to stick in the memory longer than words alone, so songs that are full of spiritual meaning can be a powerful reminder to the congregation even after they have left the church. This allows them to continue to reflect on and apply the truths of God's word in their daily lives.

To keep the worship experience fresh, engaging, and relevant for the entire congregation, it is essential to apply variety in musical styles and sermon approaches. The use of different types of musical instruments, ranging from traditional to modern, can create different nuances and attract the attention of congregations with different musical backgrounds and preferences. Additionally, the use of visual elements in a sermon, such as images, videos, or multimedia presentations, can help convey the message in a more engaging and understandable way, especially for those who are more responsive to visual stimuli. Thematic worship services that combine music and sermons with specific themes can also provide a deeper focus on specific topics, allowing the congregation to reflect and learn more comprehensively. By constantly innovating and adapting approaches to worship, churches can ensure that each congregation feels connected, inspired, and grows in their faith.

When contemporary music and relevant sermons are combined, congregations feel that the church understands their lives, making the church the place they are looking for, where they feel welcome and encouraged to grow. In addition, a good blend of music and preaching helps the congregation release the emotional and spiritual burden. Through praise, they express their feelings to God, and through preaching, they receive comfort, counsel, and strength from God's word.

Variety in musical styles and sermon approaches is also important to keep worship fresh and engaging. This can include the use of a variety of musical instruments, visual elements in the sermon, or thematic worship that combines music and sermons in a unique way.

Quality of Teaching and Service

Teaching that is not profound or irrelevant to the life of the congregation is often the main reason for the move. The congregation wants teaching that is Bible-based but also applicable to everyday life. A church that is too fixated on motivational sermons in the absence of solid theological depth risks losing a congregation that has a longing for deeper and more substantial spiritual growth. Congregations that thirst for a more comprehensive understanding of the faith, doctrine, and principles of the Bible will be less satisfied if they are treated only with messages that are inspirational but lack a strong theological foundation. On the other hand, churches that tend to be overly academic in the delivery of teachings, with complex and less grounded language, can also face challenges in maintaining the congregation. Teaching that focuses too much on theological details without any effort to make them easy to understand and relevant to everyday life can make most members of the congregation feel isolated and find it difficult to apply the doctrine in their personal context. A balance between theological depth and practical application is key to providing effective and satisfying teaching for the entire congregation.

In addition to the quality of teaching, the quality of the church's overall ministry also plays an important role in congregation retention. A church that does not pay attention to the needs of the congregation in various aspects, such as adequate pastoral guidance, professional counseling services, and active involvement in social services to the community, can make the congregation feel less cared for and not well served. The congregation needs more than just attendance at weekly services; They need a caring community, ready to support them in various life situations, both good and bad. Churches that are able to build a service system that is responsive to the needs of the congregation, interactive in involving members of the congregation in various activities and services, and has a real concern for social welfare will tend to be more able to attract and retain its congregation.

In this context, the role of the pastor and the entire church leader becomes crucial. The ability of leaders to build strong, trusting, and loving relationships with the congregation is a decisive factor in creating close, sustainable community bonds. When congregations feel close to pastors and leaders, feel heard, cared for, and supported in their faith journey, they will be more likely to remain faithful and actively involved in church service. Servant leadership, which has the heart of a shepherd who cares for his sheep, will create an environment conducive to the spiritual growth and togetherness of the church. Thus, the quality of relevant teaching, responsive ministry, and caring leadership are intertwined and contribute significantly to the church's ability to maintain and develop its congregation.

Technology Facilities as a Means of Supporting Worship

The use of technology in the church today has become a basic need, churches that use technology in service tend to be more attractive to the modern congregation. In addition, the use of technology can make it easier for the congregation to worship. Supporting factors in the form of technological facilities are also increasingly becoming an important element in the worship experience in the modern church. The use of technology in the church in this digital era is no longer just an option, but has become a basic need. Churches that actively integrate technology in various aspects of their ministry tend to be more attention-grabbing and relevant to congregations living in the midst of rapid technological advancements.

The use of technology is not only limited to visual or audio presentations, but also includes various digital platforms for communication, information, and congregation engagement. Informative church websites, mobile applications to access worship schedules, digital sermons, and other ministry information, as well as the use of social media to reach and interact with congregations are integral to modern church ministry.

More specifically, in the context of live worship in the church, the use of high-quality audio-visual devices significantly improves the quality of the worship experience. Wireless microphones provide the flexibility for speakers and worship leaders to move and interact with the congregation without being tied to cables. A good speaker and audio system, including an audio mixer that allows for optimal volume and clarity adjustments, ensures that every word spoken and every note of music played can be heard clearly by the entire congregation, even at the back of the church.

In addition, the use of projectors and screens as a means of visual presentation opens up various possibilities to increase the involvement of the congregation in worship. Engaging and informative presentation slides can be used to showcase song lyrics, Bible verses, key points in sermons, announcements, and even relevant short videos. Effective visualization helps the congregation to be more focused, understand the message better, and actively engage in worship. Thus, the proper and effective integration of technology not only makes it easier for the congregation to worship, but also creates a worship experience that is more interesting, dynamic, and relevant to the context of the times.

The Impact of Aging on Church Growth

Churches with a majority of elderly congregations face a significant demographic challenge, which is the natural decline in membership as age and mortality increase. This phenomenon is an inevitable reality in the life cycle. However, this challenge is exacerbated when the lack of regeneration in church leadership becomes a crucial issue. When there is no significant effort to engage the younger generation in various ministry and leadership roles, the long-term sustainability of the church is threatened. The lack of youth involvement not only impacts a lack of energy and fresh ideas, but also on a lack of continuity of leadership and ministry in the future.

The age of the congregation is indeed a natural process that cannot be changed. However, the church has an important role to play in responding to these challenges wisely and strategically. One of the steps that can be taken is to strive for service governance that specifically pays attention to the needs and potential of the elderly congregation. Rather than seeing them as burdens or passive groups, the church can see them as a valuable resource with rich life experiences and spirituality.

It is important for the church to provide opportunities for the elderly congregation to remain actively involved in ministry according to their capacity and physical condition. Various types of services can be designed and adjusted so that they can be reached and carried out by the elderly. A concrete example is the formation of the Intercessory Prayer Team which involves the elderly in praying for the various needs of the congregation and church ministry. Their life experiences and closeness to God are often a source of strength and wisdom in prayer. In addition, the role of Usher or reception officer can also be a forum for the elderly to continue to contribute to maintaining order and comfort in worship.

Services that are specifically designed to involve the elderly congregation are expected to be able to provide new passion and enthusiasm for them. When they feel needed, valued, and have a meaningful role in the church community, it can have a significant positive impact on their emotional and spiritual well-being. They will feel that in old age, they still have a purpose and are able to make a valuable contribution to the church. This not only benefits the elderly themselves, but also provides an inspiring example for the younger generation of the importance of valuing and involving all members of the congregation in the ministry, regardless of age or physical limitations. In this way, the church can create an inclusive and supportive environment, where each member of the church feels that they have an important place and role in building the body of Christ.

The Important Role of Congregational Visits

Congregational visits are a crucial pastoral initiative in the church's efforts to embrace and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among members of the congregation, especially for those who have entered old age. A pastor's duty as a good shepherd is not only limited to delivering sermons in the pulpit, but also actively manifests itself in the form of ministry visits to the congregation in their homes, in hospitals, or in other relevant places. The practice of this visit is a tangible manifestation of a

shepherd's sincere concern for each individual in his flock.

Through this visit, a pastor shows concretely that he not only knows his congregation in general as a group, but also has a personal concern for each member, including those who may be facing various personal struggles or challenges in the family. In this life, each member of the congregation has a unique background, experience, and needs. Some may be struggling with health, finances, loneliness, or other issues that require special attention and support. Therefore, they eagerly expect the presence, attention, and prayers of their spiritual leader.

While sermons delivered in church provide spiritual strengthening and helpful counsel for the entire congregation, personal visits have a much deeper impact in uplifting, comforting, and strengthening the heart of each individual. In a more intimate and personal setting, a pastor can listen carefully to the complaints, hopes, and concerns of his congregation. Through sincere and empathetic conversations, pastors can provide relevant counsel, specific spiritual guidance, and prayers that are specifically offered to the needs of the congregation.

The presence of a pastor in the midst of the congregation in their personal situation brings deep comfort, especially to those who are going through difficult times. The moral and spiritual support provided directly can provide new strength and hope for them to continue to step forward in the faith. The guidance provided by the pastor, which is based on the teachings of the Bible and his pastoral experience, can help the congregation find the right perspective and the right solutions in dealing with life's various challenges. More than that, the prayers offered together during the visit strengthen the faith of the congregation, reminding them of the presence and love of God who is always with them in all situations.

Thus, congregational visits are not just a routine task of a pastor, but a tangible manifestation of essential pastoral ministry. Through these personal and loving interactions, the church builds a closer relationship with its congregation, strengthens a sense of community, and shows that every member of the congregation is valued and cared for. Especially for elderly congregations who may have physical or social limitations, visits from pastors are a source of joy, comfort, and a reminder that they are not forgotten by the church community. Through visits, conversations, and prayers, pastors can bring comfort, guidance, and strengthen the faith of the congregation.

CONCLUSION

The movement of the congregation is an early sign that the abandoned church is in need of revitalization. The church needs to evaluate the cause of the decrease in the number of congregations due to moving to other churches. The Church needs to contextualize its ministry to the development of the times in order to be able to respond to the needs of the increasingly modern congregation and be surrounded by various information from social media. Renewal in liturgy and worship praise, teaching/sermons relevant to the needs of the congregation and the times, competent ministers in teaching, the use of technology in the implementation of worship and ministry, and pastoral visits need to be considered to revitalize the growth of the church.

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