

ALLIANCE UNIVERSITY

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE CASE STUDY PAPER:

DIASPORA CHURCH

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Abstract

Diaspora Church is failing. Culture has been playing a big role in the diaspora churches around the communities. In the past decades when immigrants were coming to the United States, the local churches in the community were the center of resources for them to survive. The church was there to help them facilitate in every aspect of their lives. Not only the services in the church were in their native language but they were also operated within the realm of their culture. For instance, the local church celebrated holidays and other traditions based upon the culture of the immigrants.

Introduction

Through my experiences with diaspora churches, I came to realize the diaspora Churches are experiencing similar issues. I have had several experiences with diaspora churches. My experience at the Korean Diaspora Church and my own church in the Haitian community are very similar. The Chamsarang Korean Methodist Church is located at 94 Fulton Avenue, Hempstead, NY 11550 and is led by Pastor Ken. The Holiness Church of God, the Haitian church is located at 30 Hempstead Turnpike, West Hempstead, NY 11550 and is led by Reverend Rolin Solage. The main common issue I experience with both churches is culture.

Culture seems to be one of the main issues within the diaspora churches. Many of the diaspora churches don't like to operate out of their customary way of doing things. For instance, at the Korean Church the pastor shared with me the need of a youth pastor for the Church. So, I mentioned to him that there are a few students at my seminary school (Alliance University) who will be graduating soon and would love to work with his Church. He told me the person would have to be Korean. His request was strange to me simply because the youth service is English,

and the youth primary language is English. So, to him since the Church is a Korean Church then anyone who serves should be Korean.

Background

Normally the diaspora church in the community would have several activities and programs to help the immigrants to adapt in the United States. The church would have ESL (English As a Second Language) program to teach the immigrants to speak English. The church would also have job placement to help the immigrants find jobs even without a green card or social security. If the church did not have the programs available, they would serve as a center to help the immigrants connect to other places who did. Honestly speaking, I think those days may have been the better days for the local churches or diaspora churches. Not only they were having Bible study and Sunday services, but they were reaching and helping out the community. This is exactly the way the local church should operate.

Case Presentation

Now, as society changes, people change and the need for people has changed as well. The only issue is the local church has not changed its approach to meeting the needs of the people. Due to the rapid growth of technology, people have changed the way they used to operate. Access to information is rapid and is in the hands of almost everyone. Google and YouTube have become major hubs of information. Now, immigrants who travel to the United States or other countries do not necessarily need the help of the Church for information. That part used to play a major role for the Church. Also, the immigrants who came to the United States in the early 40s, 50s, and 60's and or perhaps up to the 80's have children who have children who have adapted to the western culture.

So, when Pastor Ken told me the Korean church needs a Korean speaking person to lead the youth, I saw that as a factor that will render the growth of the Church. Maybe there was a time where all the church needed was Korean speaking decent to operate the needs for the function of the Church. Now, due to the vast knowledge and access of information through technology, the demand has changed. The word of God has not changed but the approach toward others for Christ has changed. Nowadays, we can reach out to people over social media and even conduct church services online. So, the service the local churches provide to the community are no longer the same. Also, culture has crossed over. Folks are not just marrying within the same culture or same ethnicity. So, if a church only operates to a specific ethnicity, it most likely will not survive. Not to mention, the purpose of the church is to serve the community not a specific ethnic group of people.

My experience at my Church: The Holiness Church of God, a Haitian Creole and French speaking church is that it is limited to its purpose. My church only operates in Haitian Creole and French speaking language and specifically serve the Haitian community. Though the church positions in a country and community that speaks English, it stills operates within its own ethnic group. Nonetheless, the church's goal is to preach the gospel to people.

Discussion: How Can The Church Address This Issue?

My question to my fellow members has always been very simple, what happen if someone other than Haitian decent decide to accept Christ as Lord and Savior and want to fellowship with the Church? Well, that question was answered about three years ago. I was leading a fasting prayer service for the month of January. The service was every day at 7pm for one hour. The prayer service was in Haitian Creole. One night, as we were all praying, a young woman came inside the church asked for prayer and to accept Christ as Lord and savior. She was a white woman

born in this country (USA). So, I asked her the question how you know there was a service at the Church, and did you understand anything that were being said as we were praying in Haitian Creole. She replied, she did not understand but she felt in her heart to come in and ask for prayer of repentance, also, she could feel the presence of God.

So, I was so happy to hear that. As I prayed for her, she accepted Christ as Lord and savior. I was so happy that it was done that way. That night, I said to myself, now there will be changes inside the church, we will have to accommodate to the sister's need. So, we will need to have an English service which I was excited for. Knowing how the church folks tend to behave and act, I took a proactive approach and decided to talk to them about the way they should treat our new members. Well, a long story short, the indifference within us drove her out in about two weeks later. I was devastated by the outcome and realized that we have failed as people of God, and we have failed God. It became clear to me the church will not grow until the members recognize the purpose of the local church here on earth and to make every effort to pursue that purpose.

Conclusion

Due to interracial marriage and adapting to different styles of living, the diaspora churches are fading rapidly. There may have been a time when the diaspora church was all the resources needed. There may have been a time when the local people only spoke one language and married in the same culture. Gracefully, that time has changed. The current generation has interracial marriage, and more than one language is spoken at home. So, the diaspora Churches need to adapt to the new approach of serving the community. Since the community no longer speaks one language and the church is no longer the main resource of life's survival in a strange land, the

need to adapt to multicultural worship services is highly imperative. The aim the diaspora church should go after is the integration of several services in different languages based upon the need of the community.

The short-term goal for this conflict resolution is to encourage the younger generation to attend the church or the church that they basically grew up at. The reason is simple, as the older generation fades, a new generation will lead the church. Without proper guidance and teaching, the church doors will be closed. The older generation needs to be part of the current generation program. Don't just create a youth program and hire a youth pastor and think that will solve the issue. It only creates more issues and division. The outcome of this idea is that the youth will run its own service and the older generation will have its own service; so, there will be two churches in one building. It is one church, so let us integrate both generations into one service for the sake of the growth of the church.

The long-term goal is simple as well because it has to do with change. I am not indicating it is easy but simple. The diaspora churches need to start adapting with the need of preaching the gospel to anyone and everyone. It should not only be based upon one specific ethnicity. Also, to understand that the house of God belongs to everyone. All is welcome at the house of God. The older generations from the diaspora Churches need to make an effort at adapting to changes so that folks from different ethnicity and culture can start attending the church. As society changes, culture changes as well. A Haitian person maybe born in Haiti and or raise in a Haitian society and yet does not adapt to the Haitian mentality or culture. Our identity is no longer based upon where we are from, but it is based upon our lifestyle.