

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

**ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – III Issue -III (May-June) 2025

Frequency: Bimonthly



## AFRICAN PROVERBS AND STORY TELLING IN TEACHING THE BIBLE: IMPACT ON MEMBERSHIP NURTURE AND RETENTION IN POST MODERN CHRISTIANITY

**KINGSLEY CHUKWUEMEKA ANONABA (PhD)**

Religious Studies Department. Babcock University Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

| **Received:** 12.05.2025 | **Accepted:** 17.05.2025 | **Published:** 19.05.2025

**\*Corresponding author:** KINGSLEY CHUKWUEMEKA ANONABA (PhD)

Religious Studies Department. Babcock University Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

### Abstract

*In the 21st century, the Christian church faces the challenge of nurturing and retaining members in an increasingly complex and diverse world. This study explores the potential of using African proverbs and storytelling in teaching to enhance church membership, nurture, and retention. African proverbs and storytelling have long been integral to African culture, serving as vehicles for transmitting values, wisdom, and cultural heritage. This research investigates how these traditional methods can be adapted and applied in a Christian context to foster deeper connections between church members and their faith. By examining the role of proverbs and storytelling in African culture and their potential applications in Christian teaching, this study aims to provide insights into effective strategies for nurturing and retaining church members. The findings suggest that incorporating African proverbs and storytelling into church teachings can profoundly impact membership, nurture, and retention. These methods can help to create a sense of community and shared identity among church members, while also providing a framework for exploring complex theological concepts in an accessible and engaging way. The study concludes that African proverbs and storytelling offer a valuable resource for Christian educators and church leaders seeking to nurture and retain members in the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** African proverbs, story telling, membership nurture, retention, post modern Christianity

## INTRODUCTION

Since the incursion of the gospel into West-Central Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, one can opine that the impact of the gospel has not been felt, as there appears to be a detachment from the context of the people. Context in this sense means the culture and mores of the people. Kwame Bediako of Ghana, John Mbiti of Kenya, and Desmond Tutu a Nobel Peace Prize laureate of South Africa, unanimously drive home the opinion of the writer.

In the second century, early Christians faced criticism for being ruthless and disloyal to their cultural heritage. Similarly, African Christians today struggle with the legacy of colonialism and the imposition of Western Christianity, which often disregarded traditional African religions and cultural practices. African theology must engage with these cultural concerns, rather than simply adopting Western theological frameworks.<sup>1</sup>

John Mbiti challenges the notion that traditional African religious ideas are demonic and anti-Christian. He emphasizes the importance of oral traditions in African cultures, highlighting their role in transmitting religious and philosophical wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

Desmond Tutu has emphasized the significance of African proverbs in preaching the gospel. He advocates for an African-centred approach to theology, highlighting the importance of indigenous wisdom and cultural relevance. He stresses that African proverbs convey valuable insights into the human condition, making them an authentic and effective tool for preaching. He argues that using African proverbs helps to contextualize the gospel, making it more relatable and meaningful to African audiences. 'We Africans have a rich heritage of proverbs that convey profound wisdom.... We must reclaim this heritage and use it to nourish our spirituality'<sup>3</sup>

Jesus often taught with parables. The most famous form used by Jesus in His teaching is the parable. Scholars have frequently pointed out that this is the most characteristic element of Jesus' teaching since about 35 percent of his instruction in the Synoptic Gospels is found in parabolic form.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus used the proverb form. On several teaching occasions spoke a saying that strikingly made a memorable statement. Generally speaking, a proverb is characterized by succinctness and consists of one sentence. Examples of Jesus' proverbs are:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21) Prophets are not without honor, except in their own hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house (Mark 6:4). No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62)

---

<sup>1</sup> Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century and in Modern Africa*. Oxford:Regnum Books International, 1992. Print

<sup>2</sup> Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1962. Print

<sup>3</sup> Tutu, Desmond. *God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for our Time*. New York:Doubleday, 2004. Print

<sup>4</sup> Blomberg, Craig. *Interpreting the Parables*. IL: InterVarsity Press,1990. Print

All who take the sword will perish by the sword (Matthew 26:52).<sup>5</sup>

## PROVERBS AND STORYTELLING IN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Africa has always had its peculiarities, often embedded in the vehicle of language and expressed through various means: proverbs, parables, didactic stories, and customs.

African proverbs are concise and wise sayings that express the accumulated wisdom, experiences, and values of African people. African proverbs and stories have long been a vital part of the continent's cultural identity, conveying moral lessons, cultural values, and traditional wisdom. As Christianity spread throughout Africa, these proverbs and stories were often used to illustrate biblical principles and teachings.<sup>6</sup>

African proverbs are a treasure trove of wisdom, containing insights into the human condition, morality, and spirituality."<sup>7</sup>

It is pertinent to note that "African stories are a powerful tool for conveying moral lessons and cultural values."<sup>8</sup>

Storytelling is a method of recording and expressing feelings, attitudes, and responses of one's lived experiences and environment<sup>9</sup>. The function of storytelling has been identified as mediating and transmitting of knowledge and information across generations, conveying information to the younger generations about the culture, worldviews, morals and expectations, norms and values<sup>10</sup>

According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, storytelling is retelling a tale or narrative to one or more listeners through voice and gestures. It is not the same as reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory. The storyteller creates and generates a series of mental metaphors and images associated with words. This means storytelling can be packaged in forms such as songs, music, dances, plays, dramas, and poetry. Stories may be sung, along with musical accompaniment on a certain instrument.<sup>11</sup>

Different cultures have stories created to make sense of the world, yet have many things in common, such as oral narration, moral teachings, use of gestures, and repetition.

Traditionally, African people are rooted in oral cultures and traditions, and as a result, they have esteemed good stories and vibrant storytellers. Ancient writing traditions do exist on the

---

<sup>5</sup> Joachim, Jeremias. *The Parables of Jesus*. New York: Scribner's,1963.Print

<sup>6</sup> Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Relevance of the Early Church for African Church and Theology*. Oxford: Regnum Books,1992. Print

<sup>7</sup> Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London:Heinemann,1962. Print

<sup>8</sup> Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind:The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann,1986. Print

<sup>9</sup> Gbadegesin, Segun. *Destiny, Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence*.Ibadan: Hope Publications,1991. Print

<sup>10</sup> Alidou, Ousseina. "Gender, Narrative Space, and Modern Hausa Literature." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 33,no.2,2002, pp. 137-153.(link unavailable)

<sup>11</sup> Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind:The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann,1986. Print

African continent, but most Africans today, as in the past, are primarily oral peoples, and their art forms and stories are oral rather than in written form. Since olden times, storytelling within the African culture has been a way of passing on traditions, codes, values of acceptable behaviour, as well as upholding and preserving good social order. Before writing and reading were developed in ancient Africa, Africans used storytelling as the most common form of preserving their history, traditional culture, and ritual ceremonies. The tradition of African storytelling is one of the oldest in African culture, across the continent.<sup>12</sup>

Traditional oral stories of African people have been woven out of the substance of human experience, struggles with the land and the elements, movement and migrations, wars between kingdoms, conflicts over pastures and waterholes, wrestling with the mysteries of existence, and life or death. African stories reflect relations among humans, man and woman, and humans and the animal world. This is shrined in the African concept of “Ubuntu”. Ubuntu means “I am what I am because of you”. The whole concept is centred on people or humanity. These stories offer explanations of natural phenomena, teach morality, provide African people with a sense of identity, and are entertaining as well as instructive. The animal trickster stories are the favourite among the folktales because they include an animal trickster with human habits, beliefs, and weaknesses. These stories instill moral values in the people of the tribe or community.<sup>13</sup>

The uniqueness of African storytelling is enshrined in its distinctive ability to provide entertainment, to satisfy the curiosities of the African people, and to teach and impart important moral lessons about everyday life. Repetition of the language, rhythm, and gesture is an important characteristic of African oral storytelling. Storytellers repeat words, phrases, gestures, and verses or stanzas. The utilisation of repetition techniques makes it easy to understand and recall the stories from memory. When the audience is familiar with the stories, they actively participate as they learn important aspects of their culture.

Chinua Achebe explains that a story does many things. It entertains, it informs, and it instructs. The stories support and reinforce the basic doctrines of a culture. The storyteller would work out and calculate what is right and what is wrong, what is courageous and what is cowardly, and turn it into a vibrant story. He continues by saying that it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story that saves our progeny (offspring) from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather, it is the story that owns us and directs us.”<sup>14</sup> (Achebe, 1987, p.50)

<sup>12</sup> Kudakwashe, Tuwe. “The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African Communities in New Zealand.” Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> AFSAAP Conference: 21st Century Tensions and Transformation in Africa, Deakin University. 2016

<sup>13</sup> ibid

<sup>14</sup> Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. New York: Anchor, 1987. Print

Dr. Kwame Amoako, a respected linguist and cultural scholar, shares his insights on the power of African proverbs and their role in preserving cultural heritage. “African proverbs are vehicles of cultural transmission. They encapsulate the collective wisdom and values of our ancestors, acting as moral compasses for guiding individuals and communities. Proverbs offer concise and memorable lessons about life, relationships, and societal norms. They are deeply embedded in our daily conversations, rituals, and storytelling traditions, reinforcing the core principles that define our African identity.”<sup>15</sup>

African proverbs serve as bridges between generations, connecting the past, present and future. As young people grapple with the complexities of modern life, proverbs provide timeless guidance and teach valuable lessons rooted in cultural heritage. By embracing these proverbs, younger generations can gain a deeper understanding of their roots, foster a sense of belonging, and preserve the wisdom passed down from their ancestors.

Hence, one can safely conclude that oral African stories teach and impart principles of morality, provide a sense of identity and belonging, are used to interpret the universe, resolve natural and physical phenomena, teach morals, maintain cultural values, pass on methods of survival, and to praise God.

## PREACHING AND TEACHING THE GOSPEL

Preaching is the delivery of a sermon or religious address to an assembled group of people, typically in church. Peter Adam defines it as “the explanation and application of the word in the assembled congregation of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

J. I. Packer says that it is “the event of God himself bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction through the words of a spokesperson.”<sup>17</sup>

J. I. Packer in another context wrote, “Preaching appears in the Bible as a relaying of what God has said about Himself and His doings, and about men in relation to Him, plus a pressing of His commands, promises, warnings, and assurances, with a view to winning the hearer or hearers...to a positive response.”<sup>18</sup>

Precision is necessary in preaching, and it should have a healthy balance between the head and the heart. Divorce the head from the heart, and you will have a train wreck of emotion in the pulpit. Disconnect the heart from the head in the pulpit, and you will have a running commentary of cold theology that does not lead the congregation to proper doxology. Tears of joy, conviction, and eyes that dazzle in the glory of God are the goal, not yawns of boredom. Preaching is best accomplished through

<sup>15</sup> Moahi, Vanessa. “African Proverbs: Wisdom Passed Down Through Generations.” *Africarebirth*, 20 July 2023, (link unavailable). Accessed 7 Nov. 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Adam, Peter. *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996. Print

<sup>17</sup> Jackman, David, ed. *Preaching the Living Word*. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1989. Print

<sup>18</sup> Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels, ed. *Preaching as Biblical Interpretation in Inerrancy and Common Sense*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980. Print.



careful, expository, and passionate theological statements that are heralded from the sacred desk of God.<sup>19</sup>

Pastoral preaching ministry is a mode of the church's teaching ministry in which the preacher, most often a pastor/elder, delivers a monological exposition of scripture through a sermon (hence the field of "homiletics"), most typically as the central feature of a congregation's Lord's Day worship gathering.) The significance of preaching in the grand epic of redemption is that it is the vehicle that carries forth a prophetic message. Christian preaching, both as an ethic for the Christian life and as a ministry leadership office, traces its roots canonically from the earliest kingdom heralds such as Noah, through the long line of OT prophets that continues to John the Baptist at the inauguration of Jesus's earthly ministry. The ministerial scarlet thread for each of these is that they "saw themselves as God's spokesmen, directly commissioned by Him to declare His will to His people Israel, both in their corporate and individual lives; to influence the direction of life by encouragement, warning, and condemnation."<sup>20</sup>

In terms of content, homiletical preaching is a message (sermon) that exposit Scripture according to a hermeneutical framework that is rooted in the message of the gospel (euangélion) and the implications of redemption for the present and future. In terms of form, homiletical preaching is a rhetorical style analogous to the singular, projected voice of a herald announcing news to a gathered group as an emissary, with a prophetic tone of moral urgency and personal appeal. In terms of function, homiletical preaching is an applied ministry of doctrine, primarily focused on the affective dimension of learning, that is intended to impart conviction and inspiration to believers so that they are primed to commit themselves more deeply to abiding in Christ and bearing fruit (ref. John 15). With this in mind, we may conceive homiletical preaching as communication that employs what Augustine, drawing from Cicero, refers to as the "grand style"—i.e., teaching that is formulated to "move an audience". In comparison to the "restrained" (teaching to "instruct") and "mixed" styles (teaching to "delight"), the grand style is marked by being "inflamed by heartfelt emotion" and thus tends to "silence people's voices with its weight". This accords with Lloyd-Jones' famous characterization of preaching as "logic on fire". The pedagogical aim of preaching is to communicate biblical truth and doctrine (theo-"logic") with a particular eloquence ("on fire") to invoke a personal response on the part of a gathered congregation.<sup>21</sup>

A *kerux* (the usual word for "preacher" in the New Testament) in the ancient world was simply a herald: a guy who rode into town to deliver significant news. A *didaskalos* (the usual word for "teacher") was an instructor: someone who explained or taught something to someone else. There, it seems to me, is the difference. Preaching is proclaiming, heralding and announcing news to people – the gospel – especially (but not exclusively) to

those who haven't heard it before. Teaching is explaining things about the gospel that people don't understand, and instructing them on how to live in light of it. The most helpful illustration of this comes from John Piper. He pictures a herald riding into town, shouting from high atop his horse, "Hear ye! Hear ye! The Emperor has declared an amnesty to all slaves!" That, Piper says, is preaching: proclaiming good news, announcing something that has happened, that completely changes the situation of the listeners. But he then imagines people approaching the herald with questions. What does amnesty mean? When does this announcement take effect? Does that mean I can leave my slavemaster now? Will compensation be paid to masters? And so on. At that point, Piper says, you have to start teaching: explaining the implications of the news, helping people with concepts and ideas they don't understand, and telling people what they need to do in response, given their various situations.<sup>22</sup>

In the New Testament, the content of that good news centered around the themes of Jesus, Christ, the word, the gospel, and the kingdom. On the other hand, the nature of teaching in New Testament times was primarily to explain ideas and their implications, and to exhort people to live by declared values. Whereas the message preached was the message announced, the message taught was the message explained, clarified, and applied, with exhortation to live by it. Whereas the message preached (announced) was primarily for the purpose of conversion, the message taught (explained, clarified, applied, with exhortation) was primarily for the purpose of building faith, Christian conviction and character.<sup>23</sup>

In Antioch, the work of Paul and Barnabas is described as "teaching and preaching the word of the Lord" (Acts 15:35). Since teaching is mentioned before preaching in this verse, it maybe that the major emphasis of their work at this place and time was in teaching the brethren while their secondary emphasis was on preaching to the unconverted. In any case, preaching and teaching go together. He who preaches (announces to the unconverted) also generally teaches (explains, clarifies, applies, and exhorts those who are already familiar with what has already been announced).<sup>24</sup>

## SAMPLE PROVERBS FROM COUNTRIES IN WEST AFRICA AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOSPEL

In line with fostering the gospel in the West-Central Africa Division, this presentation zeroes in on three anglophone and six francophone countries:

ANGLOPHONE COUNTRIES – Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia

FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES – Cameroun, Gabon, Mali, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Togo.

### Nigerian Proverbs

<sup>19</sup> Buice, Josh. "Preaching and Teaching are not the Same" G3min, 21 April 2016, (link unavailable). Accessed 7 Nov.2024.

<sup>20</sup> Trentham, David. "On the Relation of Teaching to Preaching" Christian Education Journal Research on Educational Ministry. vol.20, no.2, 2023,pp.157–175

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, Andrew. "What's the Difference Between Preaching and Teaching?" Think Theology, 13 May 2013 (link unavailable) Accessed 7 Nov 2024.

<sup>23</sup> ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

1. "A man who uses force is afraid of reasoning."  
**Meaning:** Resorting to violence or aggression often indicates a lack of confidence in one's arguments.  
This proverb in Nigeria resonates with the timeless gospel that true strength, wisdom and power come not from physical force or violence but from reasoning, wisdom and spiritual guidance:  
Proverbs 21:22  
Proverbs 24: 5-6  
Matthew 12: 17-21  
1 Corinthians 1:27-29
2. "You cannot climb a tree with your hands in your pockets."  
**Meaning:** Success requires effort and action; one cannot achieve goals passively.  
What a joy to know that again this proverb agrees in essence with the gospel that encourages individuals to take actions, use their abilities and be prepared to achieve their goals and fulfill their responsibilities as found in:  
Matthew 25:14-30  
Luke 12:47-48  
1 Corinthians 9:24-27  
James 2:14-26

#### Ghanaian Proverbs

1. "The mouth that eats does not talk."

**Meaning:** Those who engage in harmful or disrespectful actions may not speak out against them, embodying the idea of hypocrisy or silence in the face of wrongdoing.

Here, this proverb fits with the timeless injunction of the gospel to ensure that our speech is accompanied by corresponding deeds, as expressed in:

Proverbs 10:31-32

Matthew 7:16-20

James 2:14-16

Proverbs 18:21

2. "You learn how to cut a fish by cutting it."

**Meaning:** Practical experience is the best teacher; one learns through doing.

Again, we find the emphasis on the importance of learning through experience, practice and hands-on training in the gospel:

Matthew 4:18-22

Luke 10:1-20

1 Timothy 4:14

Proverbs 22:29

#### Liberian Proverbs

1. "The eye that looks at you is not the eye that sees you."

**Meaning:** Appearances can be deceiving; one must look beyond the surface to understand the truth.

There in the gospel we find that true understanding and perception come from a deeper, spiritual level:

1 Samuel 16:7

2. "A bird does not change its feathers because the weather is bad."

**Meaning:** True nature and character remain constant, regardless of external circumstances.

Remaining steadfast and resilient in the face of adversity is expressed in the sweet echoes of the gospel:

Psalm 55:22

James 1:2-4

Matthew 13:20-21

#### Cameroonian Proverbs

1. "He who does not understand your silence will probably not understand your words." **Meaning:** Communication is not only verbal; understanding a person involves recognizing their non-verbal cues as well.

In the gospel, we find the importance of communication:

Proverbs 10:19

Proverbs 17:28

Ecclesiastes 3:7

2. "The one who sweats more in training bleeds less in war."

**Meaning:** Preparation and hard work lead to better outcomes in challenging situations.

The importance of preparation, training and perseverance ring in the gospel:

1 Timothy 4:7-8

2 Timothy 2:3-4

Proverbs 22:3

#### Gabonese Proverbs

1. "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

**Meaning:** Teamwork and collaboration are vital for long-term success  
The gospel discusses the value of community, teamwork and mutual support:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Galatians 6:2

Hebrews 10:24-25

2. "The one who has no enemy should fear that he may have no friends."

**Meaning:** Having challenges or opposition can sometimes strengthen bonds and friendships.

The gospel discusses the importance of relationships, friendships and loyalty:

Proverbs 17:17

Proverbs 18:24

## Malian\_Proverbs

1. "The humble pay for the mistakes of their betters."

**Meaning:** Those in lower positions often suffer the consequences of the errors made by those in power; humility can lead to exploitation

The gospel conveys the idea that the actions of leaders or individuals can have consequences for others:

Proverbs 29:2

Joshua 7:24-26

Numbers 16:22

2. You are beautiful because of your possessions."

**Meaning:** Value and worth are often associated with material wealth; people are judged based on what they own rather than who they are.

Unfortunately, the gospel expresses the opposite of this Malian proverb:

Proverbs 31:30

1 Samuel 16:7

## Chadian\_Proverbs

1. "The person who has not traveled thinks his mother is the best cook."

**Meaning:** This suggests that limited experience can lead to a narrow perspective. It emphasizes the importance of travel and exposure to different cultures to appreciate variety.

The importance of wisdom, experience and perspective resonates in the gospel:

Proverbs 22:15

Proverbs 1:7

2. "The river may be wide, but it cannot drown the fish."

**Meaning:** This proverb illustrates that external circumstances cannot overpower those who are capable or resilient. It speaks to the strength and adaptability of individuals in facing challenges.

In the gospel, we find the idea of navigating through challenges and difficulties with faith and perseverance and remain unscathed:

Isaiah 43:2

Romans 8:28

Psalm 23:4

## Equatoguinean Proverbs

1. "He who does not have a mother should not go to the river."

**Meaning:** This proverb suggests that one should be cautious and aware of their surroundings. It implies that without guidance or support, one may face dangers or challenges they are unprepared for.

The importance of family, caregivers and community in the gospel cannot be overemphasized:

Exodus 20:12

Proverbs 22:6

Galatians 6:2

2. "The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."

**Meaning:** This emphasizes the importance of community and nurturing. It warns that neglecting individuals, especially children, can lead to destructive behavior, as they seek acceptance and belonging.

Compassion and belonging are emphasized in the gospel:

Matthew 25:40

Psalm 68:6

## Togolese Proverbs

1. Tasty soup (meal) draws seats (people) to itself.

**Meaning:** Good behaviour does not have to be advertised because it is good for its own sake.

Hospitality in relationship is of essence in the gospel:

Luke 14:12-14

Acts 2:42-47

Proverbs 22:9

2. Suffering and happiness are twins.

**Meaning:** Life is a mixture of joy and suffering; and so, we must learn to accept both ( acceptance of both is a sign of maturity)

Indeed, there is a close relationship between suffering and happiness in the gospel:

Romans 5:3-5

James 1:2-4

Psalm 126:5-6

If there exists this intimate relationship between the gospel and the sampled proverbs, how does this benefit the church?

## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION AND NURTURE

Membership retention refers to the strategies and practices employed by organizations, including churches, to keep their members engaged, active, and committed over time. It involves *understanding the needs* and expectations of members and fostering a sense of belonging and community.<sup>25</sup> And one of such needs is to feel accepted and a sense of belonging as one connects with the church.

### Ways of Church Membership Retention

1. Strong Community Building: Foster a welcoming and inclusive environment where members feel connected and valued.

<sup>25</sup> McIntosh, Gary. A New Look at Church Growth and Leadership. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. Print

2. **Effective Communication:** Keep members informed through newsletters, social media, and regular updates about church activities and initiatives.
3. **Engaging Worship Services and Bible studies:** Ensure that worship services are meaningful and relevant to the congregation's needs and studies in the bible.
4. **Discipleship Programs:** Offer classes and small groups that focus on spiritual growth and development.
5. **Volunteer Opportunities:** Encourage members to get involved in various church ministries and community service projects.<sup>26</sup>
6. **Personal Follow-Up:** Have church leaders or members reach out to individuals, especially newcomers, to check in and invite them to participate more actively.
7. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Create avenues for members to provide feedback about church services and programs, making them feel heard and valued.
8. **Celebration of Milestones:** Acknowledge members' personal milestones example birthdays, anniversaries, to foster a sense of belonging.
9. **Regular Events:** Organize social events, retreats, and fellowship opportunities to strengthen relationships among members.
10. **Leadership Development:** Provide training for emerging leaders within the church to empower them and create ownership of church activities.
11. **Prayer:** God does nothing except in answer to prayer, praying for your church members and the surrounding community and ask God to do great things.<sup>27</sup>

#### Types of Membership Retention in Church

1. **Relational Retention:** Building strong personal relationships within the church community.
2. **Spiritual Retention:** Ensuring members are growing in their faith through teaching and discipleship.
3. **Cultural Retention:** Aligning the church's culture with the values and needs of its members.
4. **Emotional Retention:** Supporting members through life's challenges, ensuring they feel emotionally supported.
5. **Social Retention:** Fostering social connections among members to enhance their commitment to the church.
6. **Service Retention:** Encouraging members to serve within the church, giving them a sense of purpose and belonging.

<sup>26</sup> Barna, George. Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them. IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2014. Print

<sup>27</sup> Rainer, Thom. The Bridger Generation. Tennessee :Broadman&Holman, 1997. Print.

7. **Mission-Focused Retention:** Engaging members in the church's mission, making them feel part of something larger than themselves.
8. **Communicative Retention:** Keeping lines of communication open to address concerns and suggestions from members.<sup>28</sup>

#### Characteristics of Membership Retention in the 21st Century

1. **Digital Engagement:** Churches utilize social media and online platforms to connect with members, share content, and foster community, allowing for increased engagement beyond physical gatherings.
2. **Diversity and Inclusion:** Emphasizing multiculturalism and inclusivity in church programs and leadership helps attract and retain a broader range of members.<sup>29</sup>
3. **Focus on Community:** The importance of building strong community ties is paramount, with an emphasis on small groups and fellowship activities that foster deeper relationships.
4. **Flexibility in Worship:** Offering various worship styles and times accommodates different preferences and lifestyles, appealing to a wider audience.
5. **Holistic Approach to Spirituality:** Recognizing mental health, social justice, and community service as integral to spiritual growth reflects modern values and retains members.
6. **Technology-Enhanced Learning:** Incorporating technology into education and discipleship example online courses, webinars, provides accessible opportunities for spiritual growth..
7. **Authenticity and Transparency:** Members seek authenticity in leadership and church communication, preferring organizations that demonstrate honesty and vulnerability.<sup>30</sup>
8. **Emphasis on Service and Mission:** Active participation in community service and mission work helps foster a sense of purpose and commitment among members.
9. **Inter-generational Connections:** Creating opportunities for different age groups to connect and collaborate enhances community and retention.
10. **Feedback and Adaptation:** Regularly seeking and responding to member feedback ensures that the church remains relevant and aligned with its members' needs.<sup>31</sup>

Church membership retention is vital for fostering a thriving congregation. By implementing strategies that focus on community

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, Leith. Next Generation Church. Grand Rapids: Bakers, 2000. Print

<sup>29</sup> McNarry, Brian. Church in a Post-Modern World. Oxford: Authentic Media, 2000. Print

<sup>30</sup> Smith, Jim. Adapting to Change: Helping Churches Thrive. Nairobi: Evangel, 2002. Print

<sup>31</sup> Gonzalez, Michelle. Listening to Your Congregation: A Guide to Pastoral Care and Counseling. Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000. Print

engagement and support, churches can enhance their membership experience. Regular assessment and adaptation of these strategies will help ensure that the church remains a place of growth, connection, and service.

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

So far, this paper has explored how the church the custodian of the gospel can connect intimately with her context in carrying out the great commission without major challenges. And this involves a critical sync with the language of the people using their proverbs and stories. Hence, it is recommended that:

- 1) Critical measures should be taken to contextualize the gospel because the gospel is capable of taking roots anywhere.
- 2) Pastors, chaplains and spiritual caregivers must be sensitive to the vehicle of culture – language. They must seek to connect with people at this basic level to successfully attract them to the gospel.
- 3) People of a particular culture should not be extracted from their culture but taught to minister to their fellow people. This could be viewed as a “local sinner” telling another “local sinner” where to find salvation. This strategy will have a ripple effect on church membership.
- 4) The Seventh-day Adventist Church in West-Central Africa Division should be more intentional about reaching people with the gospel by introducing sociological courses into the training package of her pastors
- 5) More attention, if possible, more resources should be channeled into specialized ministries with robust collaboration with other ministries involved in the study of culture.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. New York: Anchor,1987. Print
2. Adam, Peter. *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*. Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 1996.Print
3. Alidou, Ousseina. "Gender, Narrative Space, and Modern Hausa Literature." *Research in African Literatures*, vol.33,no.2,2002, pp. 137-153.(link unavailable)
4. Anderson, Leith. *Next Generation Church*. Grand Rapids: Bakers,2000. Print
5. Barna, George. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*. IL: Tyndale Momentum,2014. Print
6. Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century and in Modern Africa*. Oxford:Regnum Books International, 1992. Print
7. Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity: The Relevance of the Early Church for African Church and Theology*. Oxford: Regnum Books,1992. Print
8. Blomberg, Craig. *Interpreting the Parables*. IL: InterVarsity Press,1990. Print
9. Buice, Josh. "Preaching and Teaching are not the Same" G3min, 21 April 2016, (link unavailable). Accessed 7 Nov.2024.
10. Gbadegesin, Segun. *Destiny, Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence*.Ibadan: Hope Publications,1991. Print
11. Gonzalez, Michelle. *Listening to Your Congregation: A Guide to Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Tennessee: Abingdon Press,2000. Print
12. Jackman, David, ed. *Preaching the Living Word*. Durham: Evangelical Press,1989. Print
13. Joachim, Jeremias. *The Parables of Jesus*. New York: Scribner's,1963.Print
14. Kudakwashe ,Tuwe. "The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African Communities in New Zealand." *Proceedings of the 38th AFSAAP Conference: 21st Century Tensions and Transformation in Africa*, Deakin University. 2016
15. Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1962. Print
16. McIntosh, Gary. *A New Look at Church Growth and Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. Print
17. McNarry, Brian. *Church in a Post-Modern World*. Oxford: Authentic Media,2000. Print
18. Moahi, Vanessa. "African Proverbs:Wisdom Passed Down Through Generations." *Africarebirth*,20 July 2023, (link unavailable). Accessed 7 Nov.2024.
19. Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind:The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann,1986. Print
20. Rainer, Thom. *The Bridger Generation*.Tennessee :Broadman&Holman, 1997. Print.
21. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels, *ed. Preaching as Biblical Interpretation in Inerrancy and Common Sense*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980. Print.
22. Trentham, David. "On the Relation of Teaching to Preaching" *Christian Education Journal Research on Educational Ministry*. vol.20, no.2, 2023,pp.157–175
23. Tutu, Desmond. *God has a Dream:A Vision of Hope for our Time*. New York:Doubleday, 2004. Print
24. Wilson, Andrew. "What's the Difference Between Preaching and Teaching?" *Think Theology*, 13 May 2013 (link unavailable) Accessed 7 Nov 2024.
25. Smith, Jim. *Adapting to Change: Helping Churches Thrive*.Nairobi:Evangel,2002. Print