

Mission Management in Ikwerre South District Of Assemblies of God Church: Matters Arising

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Abstract: The study investigates into the critical facets of mission management within the Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church, underscoring its pivotal role in church growth and community influence. It meticulously examines the conceptual framework of mission management, tracing its origins and evolution in the district, and delineating the key strategies employed to enhance ecclesiastical outreach and consolidation. Furthermore, the investigation identifies and scrutinizes the myriad challenges impeding effective mission management, ranging from resource limitations to communication barriers, and evaluates the consequential impact of these strategies on church expansion and community engagement. At the core of the study is the acknowledgment of mission management as an indispensable driver of church growth, facilitated by coherent strategies and policies that align with the church's foundational objectives of evangelism and discipleship. The narrative highlights the instrumental roles of church leaders like Rev. Charles Allison and Rev. Ahamba Simon in propagating the faith through concerted evangelistic and mission activities, thereby catalyzing the establishment of new congregations and fortifying the spiritual fabric of the community. Despite the notable successes, the research delineates persistent challenges that curtail the efficacy of mission endeavors, emphasizing the need for strategic interventions to surmount these obstacles. Conclusively, the study advocates a series of recommendations aimed at bolstering mission management practices within the district. These include enhancing the mission acumen of church leaders and members, conducting thorough assessments of mission impacts, addressing logistical and operational hindrances, and leveraging modern technological tools to invigorate mission activities. By embracing these suggestions, the Assemblies of God Church in Ikwerre South District can amplify its missionary impact, ensuring sustained growth and a profound community presence.

Keywords: mission, management, church management.

Within the framework of Christianity, the phrase "mission" is a comprehensive notion that encompasses several theological, ecclesiastical, and practical components. The concept of mission is derived from the theological framework of God's redeeming actions in the world, as shown in the biblical narrative, with a particular emphasis on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The term "mission" pertains to the sacred duty or commission to disseminate the Gospel, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, to both people and communities. According to Wright (2006), this declaration encompasses more than just vocal expression, since it also entails the incorporation of Christian ideals and ethics into one's everyday life.

Mission, as seen from an ecclesiastical standpoint, is often organised and implemented by various church institutions and bodies. These might range from local congregations to international missionary agencies. These organisations are involved in a wide range of activities, including evangelism, social justice campaigns, education, and healthcare services, all of which are aimed at achieving their mission goals.

In practical terms, the concept of mission encompasses a range of activities, including local outreach initiatives, foreign mission trips and social projects that specifically target those who are economically disadvantaged, oppressed or marginalized within society. According to Linthicum (1991), the primary aim is to achieve a comprehensive and integrated metamorphosis of persons and communities, including their spiritual, emotional, and material dimensions, therefore manifesting the kingdom of God in the earthly realm

Mission management in the Assemblies of God Ikwerre South District is a vital aspect of the church's operations. It involves the planning, coordination and implementation of various mission activities within the district. The district is part of a larger organization in the Assemblies of God church which is a Pentecostal denomination with a global reach. On the other hand, the mission management team in the district is responsible for setting the strategic direction for mission work and ensuring that various initiatives and projects align with the church's overall mission and goals which are overseen with the development and execution of mission programs which include evangelism, church planting, community outreach and humanitarian efforts.

The church's mission encompasses several complex aspects that need the harmonious blending of theological understanding, administrative skills and practical competencies. The effective execution of mission management plays a vital role in aligning the church's activities with its divine mission while also being flexible enough to address the practical challenges and barriers faced during community engagement. The process involves a strategic effort that carefully balances spiritual objectives and practical limitations, aiming to achieve the broad impact that religious missions want to accomplish.

It is essential to acknowledge the historical trajectory that the Assemblies of God church in Nigeria has pursued since its inception. The church, with its foundations in Pentecostal theology, has always placed significant emphasis on the significance of evangelism and spiritual gifts. The mission plan of various districts such as the Ikwerre South District of Assemblies of God is often influenced by this doctrinal foundation. Since the year 2010, Nigeria, like other African countries, has seen a notable increase in the prevalence of Pentecostalism which for Meyer (2004) is frequently resulting in the marginalisation of established religious institutions.

The leadership of the church has the difficult responsibility of ensuring that mission initiatives are both spiritually edifying and culturally appropriate, while also being properly managed. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the requirements of the community, logistical capabilities, and the distribution of resources.

Management practices include several strategies and techniques aimed at achieving organisational goals. One often used approach is strategic planning, which typically involves the utilization of

Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threats (SWOT) analysis, a framework that assesses internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. Additionally, stakeholder mapping is frequently utilised to optimize the reach and influence of an organization's activities.

According to Bower (1987) management is important to the church in three aspects. First, it calls church leaders to commit to organising the institution to achieve its vision, focusing on the proper utilization of resources. Second, a church leader does not provide mission in a vacuum but within the context of people, as such mission is all about people and not program. However, individuals have strengths, weaknesses, gifts and desire which require the church leader to have some management skills to allow him serve the people more efficiently. Third, the church has a vision and mission which they cannot accomplish apart from coordinated effort. To effectively implement these, there should be a Support line established in the area of providing materials and people who needed to be selected and trained. All these activities are at the heart of sound management and they require the application of management functions which are critical for mission and administrative operation otherwise the church is compromised and negated. Nonetheless, every church organisation should exhibit a unique organisational peculiarity that enables its leadership to effectively recruit and mobilize people with some ministry temperaments.

Garrison (2002) opines that the pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. According to Comfort (2006), the word “mission” has been co-opted by the military, marketing and public relations, but the word “mission” means “sent”. However, every church should engage in mission work. On other hand, church growth however does not just happen. It must be prayed for, planned for, believed for and worked for. Church growth is a movement within evangelical Christians which aims to develop methods to grow churches. Various church leaders have proposed different ways to grow Churches. The very nature of the church demands its reproduction because every living thing must nourish itself, grow and reproduce. This is the minimum, not the maximum, function of life. Church planning is thus an “authentic form of church growth. Healthy churches and denominations do church planting to get congregations. The transition in mission strategy from its early beginnings was fitting for that time, but as better understanding both of the biblical concept of the church, evangelism, and the role of the missionary evolved, new strategies needed to be developed in the spreading the gospel.

Ikwerre South District is one of the Districts of Assemblies of God Nigeria in Rivers State, with 15 sections and 100 churches. In as much as huge success has been recorded in missionary activities at the district level, very little has been done in mission management especially in the local churches whose activities have a lot of contribution to make in the area of Church growth. It is in this scenario that spurred this discourse in examining the emerging issues and challenges.

Conceptual Clarification

Church Mission

The term "mission" within the context of "Church Mission" carries a profound significance that transcends its ordinary usage, embedding itself into the core identity and purpose of the Christian church. This concept encapsulates a multifaceted endeavour by the church to live out its faith, embodying the teachings and example of Jesus Christ in every aspect of its communal and societal presence (Newbigin, 1989). While the mission is often associated with evangelism or missionary work, its scope are far broader, integrating spiritual, social, and moral dimensions that reflect the church's commitment to a holistic gospel. Through its mission, the church seeks to influence the world positively, advocating for and demonstrating values such as love, justice, and reconciliation.

Church Mission, as practiced in contemporary society, engages various strategies and activities to address the spiritual and temporal needs of individuals and communities. This mission is not confined to pastoral care or Sunday worship but extends to include social justice initiatives, educational programs, healthcare services, and environmental stewardship (Goheen, 2014). Such a mission reflects the church's understanding of its role as an agent of transformation within society, seeking to manifest the kingdom of God not only in individual lives but also in societal structures and institutions. The diverse expressions of Church Mission are grounded in the belief that faith should be lived out actively and engagingly, impacting every area of human existence. Furthermore, the concept of Church Mission encompasses the idea of community building, both within the church and in the wider society. This involves creating inclusive, supportive spaces where individuals can find belonging, healing, and growth. The church's mission includes fostering relationships based on mutual respect and love, embodying the unity and diversity celebrated in the Christian tradition. Through its communal life, the church demonstrates an alternative model of society, characterized by cooperation, compassion, and respect for the inherent dignity of every person. This aspect of the mission challenges prevailing societal values, advocating for a vision of community that transcends cultural, economic, and racial divides.

In its global dimension, Church Mission transcends national and cultural boundaries, reflecting the universal scope of the Christian message. The church is called to be a global community, engaging with diverse cultures and contexts to share its message of hope and redemption. This global mission involves not only cross-cultural engagement and support for international causes but also a commitment to learning from the global church, recognizing the richness and diversity of Christian faith and practice worldwide. Through its mission, the church contributes to a deeper understanding and respect among peoples, fostering peace and solidarity across nations (Wright, 2006; Bosch, 2011).

Church Management

Management, in its broadest sense, is the art and science of coordinating resources and efforts to achieve desired goals efficiently and effectively. Within various organizations, this involves a multitude of processes such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. These processes ensure that an organization's objectives are met with a minimum of resources wasted and a maximum of beneficial outcomes realized. Management principles are universally applicable across different sectors, be it in business, healthcare, education, or non-profit organizations, adapting to the unique challenges and goals of each field to facilitate success and sustainability (Drucker, 2009).

When translating the concept of management into the context of the church, one encounters a distinctive blend of secular management practices and spiritual objectives. Church management involves overseeing the church's operational, financial and administrative aspects while nurturing its spiritual mission. This dual focus requires church leaders to balance efficiently organizational responsibilities with the pastoral care and spiritual well-being of their congregation. Effective church management ensures that the church's resources are utilized judiciously, its programs are conducted smoothly, and its mission is advanced while fostering a supportive and vibrant community of faith (Malphurs, 2013).

The complexity of church management is further accentuated by its need to cater for diverse community needs, uphold its doctrinal integrity, and respond to societal changes. This means that Church managers or administrators must navigate the intricacies of non-profit regulations, financial stewardship, volunteer coordination, and community engagement, all within the framework of the church's vision and values. Moreover, they are tasked with facilitating communication, resolving conflicts, and promoting a sense of unity and purpose within the congregation. The role of

management in this context becomes crucial in enabling the church to fulfil its multifaceted mission effectively and responsively (Barna, 2017).

In essence, church management synthesizes foundational management principles with the unique imperatives of the faith-based context. It necessitates a thoughtful integration of business acumen and spiritual insight, aiming at steward resources wisely while advancing the church's mission. The effective church manager is one who can navigate the complexities of organizational dynamics while remaining attuned to the spiritual heartbeat of the community, guiding the church toward growth, impact, and faithfulness in its calling (Woods & Butler, 2015).

Location of Ikwerre South District

The Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church in Nigeria is situated within a specific geographical boundary that encompasses a number of local congregations. However, it is located primarily in Obio/Akpor local government of Rivers State. Its boundaries have implications for how mission strategies are formulated, adapted, and executed. The region's ethnic composition, socio-political environment, and economic conditions all influence the church's outreach and engagement strategies (Amaechi & Oji, 2019).

The imperative of mission management in the Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church typically involves an intricate blend of spiritual objectives and pragmatic considerations. Given the district's geography, which includes both urban and rural settings, the church has to customise its mission efforts to meet the unique needs of these communities. Adaptation to local conditions is crucial, necessitating an understanding of both the physical and human geography of the district (Okiridu, 2020).

The urban areas have seen a more rapid growth rate due to increased population density and the availability of resources. In contrast, the rural areas may have experienced steady but slower growth, constrained by limited accessibility and resources. Furthermore, the district's growth is not just numerical but also involves qualitative dimensions like doctrinal maturity, social impact, and infrastructure development.

Origin of Mission Management in Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church

The mission management of the Assemblies of God Ikwerre South District started in 1995 by Rev. Charles Allison who was the Superintendent of the Ikwerre district while Joshua Alegun was the Coordinator of the mission department. The aim of the mission is to plant more churches and to make sure that the pastors are taken care of including their accommodation. He (Joshua Alegun) went to some states in Nigeria that are walking around almost naked in order to plant churches. This continued under the leadership of Rev. Charles Allison up until 2003 when the district was split into two. The mission department was still under Joshua Alegun. A time came and the baton was changed; Rev. Joshua Alegun was given a church to oversee while Edwin Amadi became the district mission Coordinator of Ikwerre district in 2005. The purpose of it is to spread the gospel to the hinterlands and build churches there in order that they may have a place to call their own. In 2010, the district was further split into two, the Ikwerre district and the Ikwerre South. Rev. Edwin Amadi remained the mission Coordinator of Ikwerre district while Rev. Ahamba Simon became the district mission Coordinator of Ikwerre South. With a project called the home mission, within the period of 3 years over 60 churches were planted to the amazement of everyone all over the district. Then the kingdom developers were created; these were people who raise money monthly towards the advancement of mission. Though lands were bought for churches, there was the challenge of place of worship. For instance, Rumuekpe had no place of worship though it was the mission that helped establish churches there. With time, Rumuekpe had seven Assemblies of God Churches established, which are Omoviri, Mgbodo, Uduoha 1, Omogwa, Uduoha Rudoha 3, Uuuokahia, Umuova and Emioti. However, the

Ikwerre South mission management was assigned a place in Felele in Kogi State where they bought a piece of land and built a patronage in that place. The reason is to make sure that the gospel reaches the unreached.

Since 2010 until now, Rev. Ahamba Simon has been piloting the affairs of mission in Ikwerre South district except at the time when there was a temporal cut when Ikwerre west area was carved out of Ikwerre South District. Rev. Ebenezer took over by the year 2017 and as at 2022 he handed over it back to Rev Ahamba Simon. Currently the mission management in Ikwerre South is moving forward and paying dues to the missionaries that were sent to Northern areas monthly. The Ikwerre South district mission also generates fund internally to support churches having issues with buying land. They support them after seeing their effort to ensure that they get a permanent place of worship. Beyond preaching the gospel, the mission ensures that the necessities for the gospel to go far are being provided. Between 2010 and 2013 the church has given the mission management in the district two million naira to move God's work forward. The objectives and aim of mission is to ensure that the gospel reaches the unreached.

Strategies of Mission Management in Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church

The imperative of mission management serves as the practical framework through which the purpose is translated into impactful actions in the Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church, allowing the church to extend its influence, foster community development, and fulfil its commitment to sharing the Christian message with the broader society.

The following are some of the strategies of mission management adopted by the District:

i. Outreach Programmes: Mission management in the Assemblies of God Ikwerre South District involves the deliberate planning, coordination, and execution of outreach initiative to fulfil the evangelical and humanitarian objectives of the Church which is the Great Commission as outlined in Mathew 28: 19-20, where believers are called to make disciples of all nations. As at 2010, the District embarked on an outreach programme to Rumuekpe which was ravaged by communal crises. Resources such as food, shelter, etc were provided including dialoguing with the companies there on the need to help the community in building a worship centre for the people so that peace and unity could return to the community. In 2021, the District expanded its vision to reach out to other states through the General Council of the Assemblies of God by planting churches in most of the communities in Kogi state which is their mandate in reaching out to the lost. Currently the Kogi State District of Assemblies of God Church has a worship centre through the help of the Ikwerre South District Assemblies of God Church.

ii. Financial Stewardship: Between 2010 and 2013 the district was given two million naira to plant churches during which sixty-six churches were planted and many souls were won for Christ. Again, churches were built in the district and outside the district for example, the planting of the church at Rumuekpe which comprises seven villages including building parsonages for the pastors that were posted to that place. They equally extended their provision of physical infrastructure to other states such as Kogi as stated earlier.

iii. Effective Communication in Implementation of Mission: The leadership of the District consistently communicates its vision, goals, and progress to the congregation and stakeholders of the district. Regular update, newsletters, and meetings were employed to keep the churches in the district informed and engaged in the mission.

The Challenges of Mission Management in the Church in Ikwerre South District

Challenges are always attached in any endeavour someone ventures into. The Assemblies of God church in Ikwerre South District is not insulated from this. Knowing the nature of challenges which is "dynamic and not static" every church missionary must be one that is sensitive to challenges. Ukaeke,

(2008) referenced Robert Schuler's statement that "find a need and meet it, find a hurt and heal it". It is for this purpose that church missionaries of this contemporary time should search for new methods in winning souls and converting them to the church otherwise the church would become sick and unstable. Some of these challenges in the Assemblies of God Ikwerre South District are as follows:

i. Lack of adequate and capable labourers: The Ikwerre South District of Assemblies of God Church faces the problem of inadequate labourers for the evangelization of the unreached areas which is one of the oldest ministries of Jesus Christ on earth. As Jesus travelled from cities to villages doing the work of evangelism, he was moved with compassion and when he saw the people as sheep having no shepherd, He declared that "the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few" (Mathew 9:37-38). The problem of lack of adequate labourers for the planting of churches in the district is a serious one; some of the churches in the Section do not have capable labourer that can reach out to some tribes, towns and villages where the church has not been planted. Also, some of the churches planted do not have capable and trained church planters. Adding to this challenge is the fact that many big churches in the District do not encourage their members that are capable to join the mission department in the mission field for whatever reasons.

ii. Lack of Proper Screening of the Church Planters before sending them: Mission management in the Ikwerre South District usually functions from the Local Church level up to the district level. Therefore, the people that are enlisted from the local level in their churches are not properly screened and appear not to have passion for church planting. Most times, those who are not qualified are allowed from the local churches to plant churches in the mission field. This lack of commitment has often created bad name to the Ikwerre South District.

iii. Language and Cultural Problems: There has been difficulty in reaching out to some communities because of language and cultural barriers. For example, in 2021 the Ikwerre South district sent two missionary workers to Kogi State. Unknown to the two missionaries, most of the people in the area did not understand what they were communicating causing them to stay for a long time to learn how to relate with them before passing out the message of Christ. This has led to the failure in producing a truly indigenous church.

iv. Lack of Finance: Finance, from time of old been a great problem in mission management. It affects every fact of life. It gives birth to poor remuneration of missionaries and weakens the fabrics of the missions as it manifests in lack of commitment on the part of the missionaries and mission management. The missionaries that were sent to Kogi State as at 2022 had not received their two months' salary for September and October due to lack of financial support from the members in the district. However, these challenges do not stop the church of Jesus to move forward.

Impact of Mission Management in the Growth of the Church in Ikwerre South District

Growth is consistent with God's repeated statement about the general increase in world population. It is also in line with God's narrower objective for His chosen people; for to Abraham, He confirmed it is promised that his descendants should be innumerable. It is also in accordance with the expectation of Christian disciples that sharing the gospel would lead to increase in membership. This could result from fervent prayer, evangelism and discipleship. Compassion for the lost has inspired leaders, pastors and laypersons to reach beyond their tribal grouping and take the gospel to the unreached. The mission policy of Ikwerre south district aims at growth which stabilizes the church, seen as a place where everyone is vibrantly connected and lovingly serving God and expected to use their spiritual gift to grow in their spiritual journey in the mission field.

Social Impact: Since the inception of the Assemblies of God church, Ikwerre south district, mission management has contributed to the success and wellbeing of the area by encouraging good virtues amongst members and the community. Directly and indirectly through the moral training provided by

the deliberate policy and programmes of the district, the community has been impacted positively. This would be classified as community service or support to host community.

i. **Support to Host Community:** One way this is done is by the provision of water to the host community. For example, this is still running in Rumuekpe where the lives of no fewer than 300 people have been impacted, with plans of extending this noble project, possibly to other areas in the community, thereby impacting more lives for good.

ii. **Volunteer Service:** The Mission department of the district in conjunction with other districts in their local churches as a policy built on the principle that “cleanliness is next to godliness”. They always embarked on a quarterly environmental sanitation exercise which involves cleaning up drainages, cutting of grasses and disposing of garbage as a way of winning souls for Christ in community at large.

iii. **Free medicals and others:** Another strategic plan is the provision of free medical services to church members and the host community including clothing, foods and cash (money) to indigent members of the community in order to bring them to Christ in collaboration with some Non-governmental organizations (NGO).

Economic Impact: The mission department of Ikwerre south district provides start-up capital for traders and loan schemes for those involved in large scale businesses such as manufacturers, furniture making, material supplies, skills acquisition, scholarship to students etc.

Religious Impact: Through biblical evangelism and mission programmes, the number of converts recorded in the church has increased especially youths in becoming soldiers for Christ. Being the future of the church, it means that the church would be sustained. In addition, the district experienced numerical growth and strength that from 2010 to 2022, it had 142 Churches as shown in this table:

S/N	SECTIONS	NUMBER OF CHURCHES
1.	Akpor 1	10
2.	Akpor 2	6
3.	Akpor 3	7
4.	Akpor 4	6
5.	Akpor 5	5
6.	Akpor Central	6
7.	Egbeda	9
8.	Elioparanwo	8
9.	Emohua 1	7
10.	Emohua 2	6
11.	Mgbuodohia zone	3
12.	Omudioga	7
13.	Rumueme 1	11
14.	Rumueme 2	6
15.	Rumuepirikom	12
16.	Rumuolumeni 1	6
17.	Rumuolumeni 2	9
18.	Rumuolumeni 3	5
19.	Ovuawhu 1	8
20.	Ovuawhu 2	5
	Total	142

CONCLUSION

The paper has highlighted very cogent issues surrounding mission management in Ikwerre South district of Assemblies of God church. These include the concept of mission and mission management, origin of mission management in Ikwerre south district, imperative, strategies, challenges and impact. It has been established that the significant role of mission management in driving the development and expansion of the church cannot be brushed aside. It follows that the imperative is driven by the factors of the church's policy on church planting, personnel and other resources. Through effective management of mission activities, areas of friction among branches are addressed; mission activities are properly harnessed and the Lord's charge to the church in the great commission is adhered to. Thus, led by figures such as Rev. Charles Allison and Rev. Ahamba Simon, numerous churches have been planted through evangelism and community missions. The impact of mission management is evident in fostering growth through fervent prayer, evangelism, and discipleship, as well as in community development through various social service initiatives. However, challenges such as a lack of adequate labourers, language barriers, and financial constraints persist. By addressing these challenges and implementing solutions, it is posited that mission management can continue to enhance and strengthen the church's outreach and ensure sustained growth and impact in the community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Church leaders and members in Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church in Nigeria should be educated about the importance of effective mission management.
- ii. Great emphasis should be laid on the role of mission management in guiding the church's activities, ensuring alignment with its objectives, and fostering growth and impact.
- iii. A comprehensive assessment of the impact of mission management on the growth of the Assemblies within the Ikwerre South District should be conducted. This evaluation should include analysing key indicators of growth, such as membership numbers, attendance, engagement in community outreach, and spiritual development. The findings could be used to identify areas of success and areas that require improvement.
- iv. The challenges faced in mission management within the Ikwerre South District of the Assemblies of God Church in Nigeria should be identified and addressed. This includes issues such as limited resources, lack of coordination, resistance to change, or inadequate communication. Also to Effective strategies to overcome these challenges should be developed in addition to creating an environment conducive to effective missions.
- v. More hands should be engaged in mission management; those who are there should be encouraged. In addition, leaders and members should be trained on modern methods of mission management to keep in tune with modern developments such as the use of modern communication gadgets and the social media.

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