

Challenges of Equal Church Policies on Rural Pastors and Congregants: The Case of Three Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana



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ABSTRACT

Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana have various policies to guide their operations such as; administrative structure, functions of various office holders, their terms of office, activities guidelines and many more. Using the qualitative research approach, the paper finds out challenges faced by rural Classical Pentecostal Pastors, families, and congregants in Ghana with regards to policy generalization, which often fails to address some specific challenges of rural folks. Based on results from interviews conducted, this paper offers various recommendations which if adopted would help minimize the challenges of marginalization faced by pastors, their families and the church congregants to the enhancement of their holistic development.

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INTRODUCTION

Policies provide guidance, consistency, accountability, efficiency, and clarity on how any organization should operate and the Church is no exception. Examples of policy documents that guide Church operations include the constitution and other related documents. These are vital for the day-to-day running of the organization and an absence could be tantamount to organizational failure. The prototype of such policies could be attributed to the Ten Commandment or the Decalogue which is found in Exodus 20:1-17 and was further replicated in Deuteronomy 5:1-21 and handed over to Moses to guide the people of Israel. The policies were indeed vivid to address issues of all categories such as orphans, widows, strangers and many more. Jesus did not abolish the law but fulfilled it according to Matthew 5:17.

A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure or protocol. Policies are generally adopted by a governance body within an organization.¹ For Sherri Torjman, there is no simple answer to the question, of what a Policy is? This is because policies are of different categories such as; substantive and, administrative, which deal with the legislation, programmes and practices that govern the substantive aspects of community work. This dimension of policy includes, for example, income security, employment initiatives, child care services and social exclusion. In practice, most policies that are drawn by various organizations which include the Church, are general and cut across all systems of operations regardless of the location. The Church for instance has urban and rural representation but, unfortunately, the rural folks often do not benefit from the policy guidelines which affects their operations. It is to this end that this research is focused on three classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana which are mainly indigenous church organizations namely: The Church of Pentecost (CoP), The Apostolic Church Ghana (TAC-GH) and Christ Apostolic Church International (CACI) These churches have similar modes of operation and beliefs. This research seeks to find

¹ Sherri Torjman, *What is a Policy?* (Ottawa, Canada: The Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2005),2.

out the challenges of policy dissemination on rural pastors and congregants by the aid of data collected during fieldwork. It briefly discusses policies in general, Pentecostalism and equity in the policy formation of the Churches under review.

POLICIES

There are various types of policies that are developed to enhance organizational development. Vertical and horizontal policies are developed within a single organizational structure and generally commence with a broad overarching policy, sometimes called “corporate” or “framework” policy. Such decisions are generally made at the head office and guide subsequent decisions throughout the organization. At the regional level, organizations might develop regional or “strategic” policy, which translates the national decisions to the regional level, taking into consideration the specific context. The regional policy is made specific enough to guide operational decision-making.² Reactive, proactive, current, and future policies can also be categorized as reactive or proactive. Reactive policy emerges in response to a concern or crisis that must be addressed – health emergencies and environmental disasters are two examples.³

A policy is a broad concept that embodies several different dimensions. Public policy seeks to achieve the desired goal that is considered to be in the best interest of all members of society. Examples include clean air, clean water, good health, high employment, an innovative economy, active trade, high educational attainment, decent and affordable housing, minimal levels of poverty, improved literacy, low crime and a socially cohesive society, to name but a few.⁴

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism has and is growing exponentially worldwide,⁵ especially throughout Africa,⁶ but there is considerable confusion over the term used. Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori suggest that the confusion is a result of the complex social movement and the different strains of which Pentecostals come with.⁷ The different groups of Pentecostals are the classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God (AG), The Church of Pentecost (CoP), The Apostolic Church Ghana (TAC-GH), Christ Apostolic Church International (CACI) and other independent Pentecostal churches.⁸ For these classical Pentecostal churches, their emphasis is on holiness, salvation through Jesus Christ, who redeems one from danger, and makes it possible for him/her to experience what is termed in the Akan language ‘*nkwa*’ which means life in all its fullness. This embodies prosperity and peace (*ahonyade and asomdwee*). The most vital aspect of their belief is the baptism of the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues being the evidence, which to the Pentecostals, is an empowerment for service to God as recorded in Act 1:8, and speaking in tongues as authenticated in Act 19:2-6 “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*” he asked them. “No,” they replied, *experience?*” he asked. And they replied, “*The baptism of John.*”⁴ Paul said, “*John’s baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.*”⁵ As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied.”

EQUALITY

Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal or same opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability, and where they live.⁹

² Bruce I. Smith, *Public Policy and Public Participation Engaging Citizens and Community in the Development of Public Policy*, (Barrington Street: Halifax, 2003),9.

³ Torjman, *What is a Policy?* . 1.

⁴ Torjman, *What is a Policy?*, 2.

⁵ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism; The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (California University of California Press, 2007), 1-14.

⁶ Brigit Meyer, “*Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism; Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches.*” *Journal for the Study of Religion*, (2007): 5-28.

⁷ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 1-14.

⁸ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 1-14.

⁹ Nicholas Capaldi, *The Meaning of Equality*, (Hoover Press : Machan, 2001), 1.

Biblical History of Policy Equality

In the early stage of Jewish formation, when the Israelites were to possess the Promise land of Canan, God, through Moses handed them the Ten Commandments, which carried them throughout the Old Testament era. This document instructed the people with rules to be observed. Jesus who came in the New Testament era made a clear statement of how he did not come to abolish the law but rather to fulfill it. This affirmed the importance of the law in the Old Testament. The Decalogue is followed by what is often referred to as the Book of the Covenant in Exodus chapters 21–23. These two groups of laws are however different. The Decalogue is an apodictic law: it consists of absolute commandments or (more often) prohibitions, with no conditional qualifications: “you shall not murder, steal,” etc. The Book of the Covenant, in contrast, is mostly a casuistic law, of the type; “if x, then do y.” so on. In Matthew 5, It is observed that the casuistic law was abolished and the apodictic laws were fulfilled.¹⁰

When many Gentiles converted in the early church, there was a paradigm shift during the interruption of Jewish believers insisting on the enforcement of Mosaic laws on the Gentile believers (Act 15:1-6). Apostles and the elders at the Council of Jerusalem chaired by James the brother of Jesus and the head of the church in Jerusalem issued the policy known theologically as “*Ta Dogmata*” found in Acts 15:23-31(a contextualized Gentile worship of God). Pentecostal churches had since followed suit, by issuing a lot of policies to streamline their activities which have served the Churches well. However, the issue that is currently been faced by these churches is the principle of equity in the dissemination of policy guidelines and procedures to the benefit of both urban and rural branches.

Policy Generalization and its Challenges

The classical Pentecostal churches under review have their individual policies and constitutions which govern their operations. CACI and TAC-GH, have their constitution and other policy documents, while CoP has a constitution and other documents known as Ministerial Handbook which is freely distributed to all ministers and church officers, for easy reference during various decision-making sessions at their levels. However, in all the documents, not much attention is given to the rural church situation to enhance equity. All the policies have been generally written and no deliberate efforts have been made to categorize the various policies of the church to enhance equity for rural pastoral care and family welfare of the various classical Pentecostal church ministers found in the hinterlands of Ghana. In practice, pastors who are posted to rural areas often face a herculean task of handling the ministry in conformity to the laid down guidelines of the policies formulated by the Church. This is because the situation in the rural area is different from that of the urban areas. What can easily be done in the city cannot be reciprocated in the rural area. This notwithstanding, the hierarchy of the Church expects such ministers to meet various targets that have been set which is often not realistic. A ‘one-sized fit all’ approach cannot be used effectively when it comes to urban and rural church administration. Most of the churches have branches scattered in rural communities with their pastors posted to rural communities together with their families. Below are some of the policies selected to be addressed by this paper;

- a. Tithes remittances for various churches
- b. Salaries, allowances and welfare support of Pastors

METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative approach, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The category of 50 respondents interviewed included pastors, pastors’ wives, their children and elders who had served in churches both in rural and urban communities, located in the Ashanti, Ahafo, Oti, and Eastern Regions in Ghana. Some of the Communities are, Ntobroso, Otaakrom, Okyerekrom, Abuom, Asumura, Abunyanya, Bonakye, Mpatuam, Dominase, Dedesewirako, Pomaakrom, Old Tafo Akim, and Ehiamankyene.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Policy on Tithes Remittances

Tithing is an ancient phenomenon, In Leviticus 27 the Mosaic Law expressly commands the practice of

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth; A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1981), 139.

tithing, codifying it for all Israel as a combined act of spiritual service and economic obligation for the advancement of the nation. This codification, however, was by no means the birth of the tithe, but a new expression of the ancient Near Eastern tithe infused with theological significance for the new political entity of Israel.¹¹ Furthermore, the payment of tithes was no novel practice, having been performed for centuries by both biblical figures and pagans alike. It is well attested that the tithe¹² was present in the very earliest of cultures, -Roman, Greek, Carthaginian, Cretan, Silician, Phoenician, Chinese, Babylonian, Akkadian, and Egyptian, stretching back to the earliest written records of the human race.¹³ This procedure has been adopted by various church organisations including the classical Pentecostal Churches. Among the churches understudy, tithes are taken every month from members of the church, and it is the major source of income of the churches.

The respondents in the churches understudy, affirmed the above as follows;

a. CoP respondents narrated: “Tithing is the main source of income in our church which is paid by members of the church from their income to the local assembly where they worship. The tithes gathered from individual members is forwarded to the District by all the local Assemblies which form a particular District headed by a district pastor and the same is forwarded to the Area by all districts which form the area, headed by an Area Head, same is forwarded to the National Head Quarters.¹⁴ The respondents explained that, apart from the tithes, other offerings taken are minimal and hardly met the needs of the church, due to rural financial difficulties.¹⁵

The interview revealed that, in CoP, the local assembly where the tithes emanate, are allowed to deduct ten percent from the total tithes received, also utility bills are deducted from the tithes before the balance is paid to the district.¹⁶ This policy has no categorization of how much one accrues from tithes, both the rural and urban deduct the same percentage. The district also accumulates tithes from local assemblies and deducts utility fees such as power and water of the pastor’s residence and pastor’s fuel for the month, after which a ten percentage remittance is deducted to cater for the administrative expenses of the district. Aside from this, any extra official fuel expenses of the pastor are also paid for by the District.¹⁷ The church also foots the medical bills of the pastor, his wife and registered children.¹⁸ Part of the tithes to the headquarters are re-invested into various grants to the churches in rural and urban centres, However, pastors’ welfare in the rural areas is not catered for in the church’s welfare policy.¹⁹

b. The TAC-GH has a similar method of tithes collection and transmission to further levels of authority like the CoP. The remittance to local assemblies from tithes is 25% and 10% to District. The pastor’s utility bills and fuel are deducted from the 10% remittance from the tithes from the rural areas. The data however revealed that support from the headquarters for the church building and mission houses for rural communities is not encouraging, though they are supported partially.²⁰ According to a respondent, the pastor’s welfare in rural communities is problematic. He however had the assurance that there is going to be a change based on the

¹¹ Henry Landsell, *The Sacred Tenth or Studies of Tithe-Giving, Ancient and Modern*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955),12. https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/snoeberger-title-dbsj.pdf.

¹² The author intends the term in its technical sense--a tenth. As John E. Simpson notes of the nearly universal pagan practice of tithing, “the amount so given was almost invariably one-tenth” (This World’s Goods [New York: Revell, 1939]. 88). Cf., however, Joseph M. Baumgarten, “On the Non-literal Use of ma’aser/dekate,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (June 1984): 245-51.

¹³ Landsell, *Sacred Tenth*, 1-38; Arthur Babbs, *The Law of the Tithe As Set Forth in the Old Testament* (New York: Revell, 1912), 13-24; E. B. Stewart, *The Tithe* (Chicago: Winona Publishing Co., 1903), 7-13.

¹⁴ Author’s interview with six pastors of CoP in the Ashanti, Ahafo and Eastern Regions on tithes payment on 3rd, 7th and 8th September, 2020 respectively.

¹⁵ Author’s interview with four pastors, three church elders and two church members in Ashanti, Eastern and Ahafo Regions on tithes payment and remittances on 25th, 28th and 30th April, 2021.

¹⁶ Author’s interview with six CoP pastors in Eastern, Ahafo and Ashante Regions on tithes and remittances in the church on 24th, 25th and 26th May, 2021.

¹⁷ Author’s group discussion with five pastors in Eastern Region on 13th June, 2021.

¹⁸ The Church of Pentecost, *Ministerial Handbook*, (Pentecost Press, Accra,2018),91.

¹⁹ The Church of Pentecost, *Ministerial Handbook*, (Pentecost Press, Accra,2018),47.

²⁰ Author’s interview with TAC-GH minister who pastored in the Ahafo and Western North Regions on 5th March, 2021.

new policies by the newly elected leadership to take extra care of pastors especially those in the rural areas.

c. **CACI** This church like the others above collects tithes from the members and forward them to appropriate quarters as usual but the most unfortunate concern raised by the respondents was that the leadership doesn't give any remittance to the local assemblies who pay the tithes and also the district. All the tithes collected every month are forwarded to the highest office. On the issue of support to the church building and mission houses from the headquarters, it was revealed that, some roofing support could be given when requested for.²¹ The respondents who were church elders and other caretakers also complained bitterly of their dissatisfaction and the hardship the rural churches suffer, which is one of the contributing factors to the slow expansion of the church.²²

Combing through the policy documents of the three classical Pentecostal churches, all policies are generalized and since the churches are widespread in the country and found both rural and urban communities, failing to categorise decisions or policies to address challenges equitably, often affect one group, and the interviews revealed that the most affected are rural ministers and congregants, especially, ministers who have worked for more years in the rural communities with their families.

Policy on salaries, allowances welfare support of Pastors

On the issue of allowances, salaries and other incentives such as farewell packages, it is obvious that urban ministry opportunities can not be compared to rural pastoral opportunities, therefore if the same policy is used to address the challenges of both urban and rural pastors, there is no way equity distribution could prevail. Most of the respondents complained of the lack of financial support to facilitate ministerial work in their rural stations. They often had to use their own funds to support the membership and church projects which often puts a strain on their finances making them unable to fully cater for their families and other dependents. They often have to engage in other jobs to cater for their needs for example farming. This is not the case in the urban area where the pastor often gets monetary and other forms of support from the membership and he is therefore very comfortable.

The Churches also have a policy on various allowances that are allotted to the pastors. However, due to the inadequate funds received from the tithes and offerings, most pastors in the rural areas do not benefit from these incentives which is not the case for the pastors in the urban areas.

Another policy is the provision made for pastors during send-off ceremonies. In this instance, the rural pastors also complained that their colleagues in the urban areas received better packages due to the adequate flow of offerings and tithes. They added that the support (monetary gifts) the urban pastors receive in their line of work generally makes their retirement enjoyable. This cannot be said of pastors who work in rural areas for most of their lives.

These instances where a general rule applies to all pastors despite their location often put one group at a disadvantage, leading to a feeling of discontentment and a possible burn-out.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In all the three churches studied, it was realised that in the effort to support rural community churches, the CoP could be classified as performing extremely well in terms of providing accommodation to the pastors as well as church buildings for the community, but with the issue of pastoral welfare, more work needs to be done to ensure equity across the board. The author hereby recommends that the other classical Pentecostal churches emulate the effort of the CoP to make life easier for the pastors in the rural areas. Policies on pastoral support must be reformulated to make the necessary allowances for rural ministries to ensure fairness in the distribution of resources. Rural life can never be compared to living in an urban area, thus if possible, posting of pastors should be done in a manner that one doesn't spend all his life in the rural area. Constant changes must be made so that equity is ensured.

²¹ Author's interview with a caretaker and a pastor in Eastern Region, on tithes remittances to locals and Districts on 13th February, 2021.

²² Author's interview with a caretaker in Ahafo Region, on remittances from tithes to the local assemblies and the District, on 15th January, 2021.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the challenges faced by rural classical Pentecostal churches and their pastors due to policy generalization. This paper is however not against the policies formulated by the Pentecostal churches. It only addresses the challenges these policies pose to rural pastors and the churches and recommends the needed solutions, to enhance a paradigm shift from equal policies to equitable policies. This is a better solution for holistic satisfaction by all ranks and file in ministry.

ABOUT AUTHOR

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