
THE CHALLENGE OF CHURCH-HOPPING IN KENYA- FACTORS LEADING TO THE MIGRATION OF CHURCH MEMBERS FROM THE METHODIST CHURCH IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT: *Although church-hopping is a new phenomenon in Kenya, it is becoming a challenge to Christianity, where church members keep on migrating from one denomination to another with little cognizance of the effect of this migration to the church mission. This study which used the Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) as the case sought to investigate the factors leading to the migration church members from one denomination to another in Kenya. The findings of the study revealed that such factors as conservatism, poor leadership, over-emphasis on monetary giving, exaggerated development projects, the new phenomenon of prosperity gospels, spiritual thirst, poor evangelism, lack of proper worship styles e.t.c. contribute to the rapid migration of church members from one denomination to another in Kenya. The study concludes that rather than the churches in Kenya blaming the members who are migrating, they should rethink their mission strategy. The factors that are making the members to keep on hopping should be addressed. Church leaders should not expect their members to stick to their churches if they are 'spiritually' unfed.*

KEYWORDS: Church-hopping, Migration of Church members, Kenya, Methodist Church in Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Although Church-hopping is a recent phenomenon, with the early church not encountering it at all, today it has become a challenge to Christian mission where the modern church is characterized by the trend of people hopping into and out of the congregation at a moment's notice (Truth Magazine, 2013). White (2012) defines church-hopping as going from one church to another without committing to any one church for any significant period of time. Church-hopping is a challenge particularly in Africa where church members keep on moving from one denomination to another without minding of the effect of this hopping to the entire church of Christ (see Hewerdine, 2013). In Kenya, church-hopping has led to numerous tensions, hatred and divisions between denominations.¹ For instance, Barrett (1973) argues

¹ Kenya is a home to many denominations where every major tradition of Christendom is represented: Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Orthodoxy, Presbyterianism or the Reformed tradition, Lutheranism, Methodism, independent Churchmanship, Baptists, Quakerism, Seventh Day Adventism, and Pentecostalism (Barrett, 1973). In most cases these denominations are always competing for members. For example Nkonge (2004), informs of

that since the year 1914 over 150 schisms have occurred in Kenya and for a number of churches the results have been numerically disastrous. He elucidates that in 1930 the Presbyterian Mission lost nearly half its members to the African Independent Churches. Between 1914 and 1972, the Anglican Church resulted to over thirty separatists' bodies and lost over half its membership. Between 1959 and 1963, around 100,000 Catholics migrated to Legio Maria and other denominations. Certain protestant churches have at times lost 80 percent of their entire adherents. Some Independent churches have likewise suffered similar fate with Musanda Holy Ghost Church losing nearly half of its members to the Kendu Roho Church in 1960s. What causes this continuous migration of church members from one denomination to another? A study of nature is necessary to ascertain why church members in Kenya keep on hopping from one church to another.

To inform our study, we used the case of the Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) which is one of the mainline churches in Kenya. According to Nkonge (2012), the MCK has a membership of about 1,150,000 and is served by about 247 ordained ministers. Professor Zablon Nthamburi, the former presiding bishop of MCK confirms that since its inception in Kenya in the mid nineteenth century, the MCK has continuously recorded decline in membership with many of its members joining other denominations. For instance, between 1941 and 1952 and in 1976 and 1977, serious losses in membership were experienced by the MCK (Nthamburi, 1982). A careful assessment of the MCK records affirms this. For example, between 2010 and 2012, Kaaga circuit alone lost about 205 members to other denominations (Annual Synod Minutes Booklet, (2012).

Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To investigate whether conservatism and leadership issues influence the migrations of Church members from MCK to other denominations.
- ii. To find out whether increased monetary giving and many development projects influences the migrations of Church members from MCK to other denominations.
- iii. To find out whether the rise of 'Prosperity gospels' influences the migration of church members from MCK to other denominations.
- iv. To investigate other factors leading to the migration of church members from MCK to other denominations.

METHODOLOGY

To understand what is happening in MCK, we carried a study in Kaaga circuit in Meru which is the oldest circuit in MCK. Kaaga is the base of the MCK with the Methodist missionaries having settled there in 1912 after they failed to establish their presence at the Kenyan coast (Nthamburi, 1991). We were therefore convinced that Kaaga as the mother of MCK will give us a clear picture of what is happening in the MCK as well as in the entire Christian fraternity in Kenya. The study employed the descriptive survey design to collect qualitative data on the factors leading to migrations of Church members from MCK to other denominations. Descriptive survey involves the description of the state of affairs as it exists at present without much manipulation, hence the researcher has no control over the variable and one can only report what has happened or what is happening (Kothari, 2004). Mugenda and

the stiff competition for membership in Meru that exists between the Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Methodist Church in Kenya, Anglican Church of Kenya and the East African Pentecostal Church.

Mugenda (1999) recommend it as the best method available to social scientists and other educators who are interested in collecting original data for the purpose of describing a population which is too large to observe directly.

The target population for this study was the members of Kaaga circuit. The circuit is divided into three sections namely Kaaga, Chabuene and Mwanika and has eleven (11) Congregations, namely Kaaga, Kambakia, Nkoune, Kienderu, Chabuene, St. Stephens, Kiruai, Wesley, Mwanika, St. Luke's and St. Andrews. It has a population of about 4600 members and roughly 205 migrants to other denominations (Annual Synod Minutes Book, 2013). The sample for this study was selected through cluster sampling. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) observe that in this sampling method, it is assumed that clusters are similar in characteristics. Three sections within Kaaga Circuit were considered as viable clusters for this study. One congregation from every cluster was selected for the study using simple random sampling. Individual respondents in the study were randomly selected from the sampled congregation, that is, Kaaga, Mwanika and Chabuene. According to Circuit Quarterly Report (2012), Kaaga has 430 members, Mwanika 400 members and St. Luke's 370 members, hence a total of 1,200 members within the three selected congregations. A sample size of 291 is recommended for a population of 1200 (Kathuri & Pals, 1993). We then purposively identified 20 migrants which is 10% of the 205 migrants from Kaaga circuit between 2010 and 2012 using snow ball or chain sampling technique. Snow ball sampling begins with a few people or cases and then gradually increases the sample size as new contacts are mentioned by the people you started with (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

The data was collected using questionnaires as the main tool. 291 Questionnaires for church members and 20 questionnaires for migrants were designed. The questionnaires had both open and closed ended items. The open ended questions were used to encourage the respondents to give an in-depth response without feeling held back in revealing any information. The closed ended ones guided respondents in answering questions without straining as the questions gave the respondents a set of choice or options. Out of 291 questionnaires distributed to church members, 204 were returned which translated to 70% return rate. Out of 20 questionnaires distributed to migrants the return rate was 18 which translated to 90% return rate.

Data collection commenced by contacting Kaaga Circuit Superintendent Minister requesting him to grant us permission to carry out the research in his circuit and also assist us in gathering any relevant information from his Christians. Through his assistance we contacted the selected congregations through letters to the chairpersons informing them of the visits and the purpose for these visits. Before proceeding to the field, we made telephone calls to confirm whether the letters were received and to book for appointments on when to deliver the questionnaires. When contacts were established, we delivered the questionnaires during the Sunday services and distributed them to the members. We then discussed with respondents the duration of time of filling in questionnaires. Arrangements of when to collect the filled questionnaires at the appropriate time were agreed upon.

After the data was collected, we first edited it ensuring that raw data was carefully examined to detect errors and omissions as well as making corrections where possible. The second step was coding of data. Coding is the process of assigning numbers or other symbols to answers. After coding, the data was classified based on reasons why members leave the church. These classes possessed the characteristics of exhaustiveness that is there was a class for every data

item and a specific answer placed in one and only one cell in a given category set. Classification helped us to reduce several responses to a small number of classes that contained the critical information required for analysis. After classification the next step was tabulation. When the data was assembled we arranged the same data in a concise and logical order and displayed the same in compact form that is in the form of statistical tables for further analysis. We then calculated the percentages of responses which were used to make statements about the results, identify findings and make conclusions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Conservatism and Leadership Issues

We sought to find out whether conservatism and leadership issues influence migration of church members from Kaaga circuit to other denominations.

On conservatism, the MCK members were asked to indicate whether they would describe MCK as a conservative/rigid/not ready for change. Majority 165(80.88%) of the Methodist Church members indicated that the Church is conservative/rigid/not ready for change and 39 (19.11%) indicated the Church as not conservative. This implies that most of the MCK members generally feel that their church is very conservative and not ready for change. We posed same question to the migrants asking them whether they considered the MCK conservative. All of them, 18 (100%) indicated that the Church is conservative/rigid and not ready for change. Asked whether conservatism was one of the reasons as to why they had left MCK, 16 (88.9%), consented. Their response thus confirms conservatism in some churches as one of the causes of church-hopping in Kenya. When we sought the opinion of the respondents from both the MCK members and the migrants about the areas they would describe the MCK as conservative, the responses from the MCK members were as follows: those who indicated Mode of Singing / Use of hymn books as the area in which the MCK is conservative were 116 (56.9%); Programmed themes as per plan 93(45.6%); Mode of preaching 77 (37.7%) and Scripture reading as per plan, 60 (29.4%). The responses from the migrants for the same question were as follows: Mode of Preaching, 11 (55%), Programmed themes as per plan 8(40%), Mode of singing / Use hymn books 7(35%), and Scripture reading as per plan 6(30%). The responses indicate that there are many areas in the MCK, and other denominations particularly the mainline churches that are rigid and require change because they are contributing to the migration of church members. This is inevitable if at all we have to address the problem of church-hopping in Kenya.

We then wanted to find out whether issues of leadership influence migration of church members from MCK to other denominations. We asked the migrants to state whether they had been leaders in the MCK before they migrated. 13(72.2%) of them indicated they had been leaders in the Methodist Church while only 5(27.8%) stated that they had not been a leaders. The migrants who said that they had been leaders in the MCK were asked to state the position they ever held. 10(76.9%) of the stated that they were group leaders, and 3(23.1%), said that they had held the position of a secretary. Those who indicated that they had not been leaders in the MCK were asked to indicate the reason why they had not been leaders. 3(60%) indicated that they had not been interested, and the remaining 2(40%) indicated that they were never proposed. When we asked them whether their migration was in any way related to the church leadership issues, 14 (77.8%) agreed while 4(22.2%) disagreed. When we asked them to rate leadership in MCK, 13 (72%) rated it as poor, while 5(27.8) indicated that it was not poor. These findings imply that leadership issues contribute

in one way or another to the migration of church members from one denomination to another. If we have to address the problem of church-hopping in Kenya, churches must think about streamlining their leadership styles.

Monetary Giving and Many Development Projects

MCK is one of the churches in Kenya currently undertaking many development projects. Some of its main projects are the Kenya Methodist University, Maua Hospital, Nairobi Guest House, Tharaka Guest House e.t.c. All these and many other institutions have been built with contributions from the MCK members (Kanyaru, 2011). We wanted to find the extent in which monetary giving and many projects influence the migration of MCK members to other denominations. We thus asked the MCK members to rate giving in their church. Their responses were as follows: 108(52.9%), too much, 49 (24%), moderate, 42 (20.6%), satisfactory and 5 (2.5%) had no opinion. This shows that majority of the MCK members feel that there is too much giving in their church. When we asked the migrants to rate giving in the MCK, the biggest number 10(55.6%) of them rated it as too much while 6(33.3%) rated it as moderate and the remaining 2(11.1%) said that it was satisfactory. When we asked them whether their migration was in any influenced by the MCK's too much emphasis on giving so as to complete her projects, 11(61%) said 'Yes', while 7(38.9%) said 'No'. This indicates too much emphasis on monetary giving in the Kenyan churches is discouraging the members. As such they keep on moving from one denomination thinking that one is better than the other. This can be confirmed by the responses we got from the MCK members when asked them the extent to which they thought monetary giving was contributing to members migrating from MCK to other denominations. Majority 107(52.5%) of them stated that it contributed to a very great extent, 51 (25%) said to a great extent, 27 (13.2%) said to a small extent and 19(9.3%) said no extent. This is an indication that most of the church members in Kenya feel that over-emphasis on monetary giving is contributing to members' migration from one denomination to another. It is therefore an issue we cannot ignore as reflect on the challenge of church-hopping in Kenya.

The Rise of the Prosperity Gospels

Prosperity gospel also referred to as the health and wealth gospel is a religious doctrine that financial blessings is the will of God for Christians and that faith, positive speech and donations to Christian ministries will always increase ones material wealth. A lot of emphasis is laid on giving in order to receive blessings. This phenomenon is common in the mushrooming Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, Fellowships, Ministries and other new Christian religious movements that have proliferated through out the country. In the world of despair, they are promising hope which is very appealing to many worshippers (Parsitau, 2010). They are attracting masses of people for their apparent concern with economic deprivation. They also provide for the needs of the impoverished masses, especially those in the third world countries. Many desperate and poor Kenyans have a strong faith in the power of miracles promised by these movements believing that it will change their lives socially, economically and to some politically. An increasing number of Kenyans are turning to "sowing of the seed" (giving huge sums of money) at the prompting of the "pastor" who promises them to expect prosperity (Wanjuguna, 2012).

In this study we wanted to find out whether the rise of prosperity gospels influences the migration of MCK to other denominations. We commenced by investigating from the MCK members whether they were aware of the prosperity gospel movements. Majority, 183 (89.7%) indicated that they were aware of them and only 21 (10.3%) stated that they were not

aware of their existence. This shows that most of the church members in Kenya are aware of the existence of prosperity gospel currently being propagated in Kenya. When we asked the migrants whether they were aware of these prosperity gospel movements, all of them (100%) stated that they were aware of them. The phenomenon of the prosperity gospel is thus not alien to the Kenyans. We then asked the migrants the extent to which prosperity gospels were drawing members from MCK and the responses were as follows: 13 (72.2%) said to a larger extent and 5 (27.8%) said to some extent. Thus prosperity gospels in Kenya are making church members to keep on migrating from one denomination to another as they seek for more satisfaction spiritually, materially, health wise e.t.c. To get a detailed picture of the situation we asked the MCK members to tell us the main features of the prosperity gospels which attract members from the MCK and their extent. The results are analyzed in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Characteristics of Prosperity Gospels which are attracting Members from the MCK

Characteristics	Very great extent %	Great extent %	Small extent %	No Extent %	No opinion %
Offer solutions on health/faith healing	16.7	25.5	23.5	9.8	8.3
Promise wealth / prosperity	31.4	27	16.7	9.8	4.4
Promise miracles	33.3	17.6	14.2	12.3	7.4
Address immediate needs	25.5	27	18.3	5.9	6.4
Lively singing	45.1	21.1	14.2	2.9	1
Lively preaching	45.1	21.1	19.1	2	1
Good pastoral care/evangelism	32.8	10.3	22.4	4.9	5.9
Charismatic leadership	23.5	24.5	14.2	5.9	4.9

It is clear from the above table that Christians are migrating from the MCK to these prosperity gospel movements because they seem attractive to them and they also meet their 'spiritual' needs. It is therefore imperative that if the churches in Kenya hope to address the problem of church-hopping they should revisit their mode of evangelization so that they can address the needs of their followers. This is the only way they can be able to retain them.

Other Factors

Apart from conservatism and leadership issues, monetary giving and many development projects, and the rise of the prosperity gospels, we sought to explore other factors responsible for the migration of church members from one denomination to another in Kenya. We thus asked both the migrants and MCK members whether they were aware of other factors that contribute to the migration of members from MCK to other denominations. The responses we got from these two groups of respondents are analyzed in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2
Other Factors according to the Migrants

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Curiosity	1	5.6
Poor evangelism	5	27.8
Unsatisfying worship style	5	27.8
Start a Church	2	11.1
Unfulfilled expectations	3	16.7
Relocation / Transfer	0	0
Marriage	1	5.6
Misunderstanding with a leader/ member	1	5.6

From the responses of the migrants shown in the above table (Table 2) such factors as poor evangelism, unsatisfying worship style, unfulfilled expectations and a desire by some people to start their own church contribute extensively to some members migrating from their churches. This implies that MCK and other denominations in Kenya, particularly the mainline churches have to rethink their mission if the problem of church-hopping will ever cease. We should not expect members to stick to their churches if they are not 'spiritually' fed.

Table 3
Other Factors according to the MCK Members

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Promises of hope	25	12.3
Poor evangelism and lack of proper pastoral care	34	16.7
Relocations / Transfers	5	2.5
To start Churches	11	5.4
Search for spiritual nourishment	37	18.1
Unfulfilled expectations	28	13.7
Poor worship styles	31	15.1
Receive miracles and healing	33	16.1

From the above table it is clear that majority of MCK members feel that such factors as the promises of hope especially in the new Charismatic movements (see also Nkonge & Maina 2014), poor evangelism and lack of proper pastoral care, search for spiritual satisfaction, unfulfilled expectations, poor worship styles and desire for miracles contribute to the migration of members from one denomination to another. The fact that some factors are mentioned by both groups is a clear indication that we cannot take the issues raised by the respondents lightly if we have to address the challenge of church-hopping in Kenya.

CONCLUSION

From this study it is clear that church-hopping is a challenge in Kenya, where church members especially in the mainline churches keep on moving from one denomination to another with little regard of how this movement affects Christian mission in Kenya. The question which one cannot fail to ask him/herself is 'If the Church of Christ is one' (Jn 17:21), why are the church members in Kenya not sticking to their churches? Why have they to keep on hopping from one denomination to another? The major business of the church is to be in mission (Mugambi, 1989 & Nkonge 2004), but how can the church accomplish her task of being in mission if church members keep on migrating from one church to another? The findings of this study however reveal that several factors including conservatism particularly in the mainline churches, leadership issues, over-emphasis on monetary giving, exaggerated development projects, the new phenomenon of the prosperity gospels and others contribute to this scenario. Therefore, rather than blaming those who are moving to other denominations or movements, churches in Kenya must focus on these issues. The current trend where churches in Kenya have shifted their focus from preaching the living gospel of Christ to other things such as wealth or money should change.

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