



Leadership Trends and Implications towards Development of the Adventist Church in South Sudan

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Abstract

This study investigated leadership trends and implications toward development of the Adventist Church in South Sudan, using the descriptive design. Sources of data were interviews and documents. Twenty-five church leaders, pastors and members participated in the study. Data was analyzed through the thematic approach. The study revealed that the establishment of the Adventist church in South Sudan was influenced by dedicated missionaries like Daudi Ogillo from Tanzania and Gerald Whitehouse from the United States of America. Besides planting churches, these leaders established humanitarian and medical services which propelled the development of the church. The leaders experienced communication challenges and religious restrictions as major challenges. Indigenous leaders followed the footsteps of the non-indigenous leaders by applying the principles of servant and spiritual leadership. As a result, church membership has increased and 41 pastors have received ministerial ordination. Other developments include professional development of church workers and establishment of 34 primary schools. The study recommends that the current church leadership continues working sacrificially to foster the church growth and development. The leaders should take advantage of the improved conditions to accelerate the church growth. The leadership should prioritize church employees' professional development and church members' self-reliance through regular training.

Keywords: Servant leadership; spiritual leadership; indigenous leaders; non-indigenous leaders; church, growth.

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Introduction

Merriam-Webster (1988) defines a leader as “a person who has commanding authority or influence.” Sanders (1989, p. 25) adds, “Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others. One man can lead others only to the extent that he can influence them to follow his lead.” According to Clinton (2012), a Christian leader is a person with God-given capacity and a God-given responsibility to influence God’s people towards the fulfillment of divine purposes. Branson and Martinez (2011) define leadership in the context of church as an organization. They argue that leadership is about shaping the organizational environment. The authors provide three important spheres of leadership: interpretive, relational, and

implemental. The authors argue, “Interpretive leadership shapes the leadership team and the whole congregation to pay attention to and interpret texts and contexts, all in service of attending and being responsive to God’s initiatives. Relational leadership focuses on human connections and synergism toward an embodiment of gospel reconciliation and love. Implemental leadership, on the other hand, guides reforms and initiates activities and structures so that the church embodies the gospel.”

According to Sanders (1994), Christian leadership is a vocation which blends both human and divine qualities for the blessing of others. According to Branson and Martinez (2011), the human qualities of a leader include prioritizing conversations among

team members, encouraging opportunities to be home, asking about personal and family stories and provide training and opportunities that increase the values of conversations. The divine qualities of a leader include learning from other churches and their leaders, asking about church stories, weaving together the Bible stories with the stories of the church and community.

According to Blanchard (2016), Jesus is the greatest leadership role model for leaders today. He delegated leadership to His disciples before leaving this earth for heaven. However, Jesus assured the disciples that He will not leave them alone. He would be with them through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). In the same manner, contemporary Christian leaders need to follow the example of Jesus by providing necessary support to their subordinates.

Servant leadership is one of the important approaches to leadership that Jesus validates for His followers. He showed this type of leadership to His disciples during the Lord's Supper (John 13). Jesus knelt down and washed His disciples' feet and He served them during the supper time. He said that He came to serve not to be served. Jesus also showed that His leadership is a spiritual one. He demonstrated this when He spent many hours in prayer. He also taught His disciples how to pray. Moreover, He healed the sick through the power of the Holy Spirit that was with Him. Furthermore, he preached and taught about the kingdom of God (Matthew 5-7).

According to the book *Seventh-day Adventist Believe* (1988), the Adventist Church is a community of believers who confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. These people are called out from the world to worship, to fellowship to celebrate the Lord's Supper and to proclaim the gospel to other people. Gen. 12:1-3; Ex.19:3-7; Matt.16:13-20; Acts 2:38-42; 1Peter 2:9). These services require members of the church to have proper leadership that guides for effective results. In implementing these services, the Adventist Church in South Sudan did not have indigenous trained leaders to run the church from its beginning. Therefore, the worldwide church used leaders from different countries to establish the Adventist presence in the country. These non-indigenous leaders managed to establish a strong Adventist presence in the country. When the national leadership assumed full control of the work from the year 2012, they were able to move the

church work forward more quickly because a conducive environment had already been created by the non-indigenous leaders. This study sought to establish trends and leadership implications in the development of the Adventist church in South Sudan.

Biblical/ Theological Reflection on Leadership

The Holy Scripture is full of the teachings on leadership, both in the Old and New Testaments. Particularly, the Bible portrays people like Moses, Joshua, and David as leaders in the Old Testament while Jesus and His apostles are portrayed as leaders in the New Testament. Moses demonstrated delegated leadership style, according to Exodus 18:24-26. Joshua practiced both servant leadership and spiritual leadership styles when he declared that his household would worship the Lord if others would choose otherwise (Joshua 24:15). David also practiced delegated leadership styles when he delegated his generals to fight battles in which he himself was to be present (2 Samuel 11:1).

Jesus, as the founder of the Christian church, practiced at least two types of leadership. One is servant leadership and the other is the spiritual leadership. Sanders (1989, p. 26, 27) defines spiritual leadership as "a blending of natural and spiritual qualities." He further argued that a spiritual leader "is able to influence others spiritually because the Spirit is able to work in and through him to a greater degree than in those he leads." This is exactly what happened to Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit was with Him, He was able to lead others in a spiritual way. He applied spiritual leadership especially in matters of prayer (Matt. 6: 5-15). A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong." In other words, a servant leader leads by example. This is what Jesus did when He washed His disciples' feet at the Lord's Supper (John 13:1-17). He told them that He gave them example to follow (John 13:15).

Servant Leadership

One of the leadership styles that Jesus and His disciples practiced is the servant leadership. The gospel of John presents Christ's servant leadership style more clearly in chapter 13 when Jesus knelt down and washed His disciples' feet during the Passover meal. Here, Jesus demonstrated clearly to His disciples that He came not to be served but to serve others. As Sanders (1989, p. 10) writes, "True greatness, true leadership is achieved not by

reducing men to one's service but in giving oneself in selfless service to them."

McManus et al. (2018) discusses the concept of servant leadership. The source considers servant leadership as a formal concept in leadership studies, tracing its roots directly to a single twentieth-century author called Robert Greenleaf. Servant leadership has roots that spread deeply and widely throughout history and cultures. As leaders cultivate and practice servant behaviors consistently and intentionally, they will inspire and empower others to do the same. If servant leaders are successful, both they and their followers will make ethical choices, perpetuating a culture of service, care and responsibility. Damazio (2013, p. 123) described servant leadership as a special kind of leadership where people serve as Jesus served. "They don't serve in order to get into leadership; they serve because they are servants. While leaders serve, servants lead."

Jesus considered the position of a servant leader as that of a steward. He indicated this in His prayer to God the Father in John 17 when He had kept the disciples the Father gave Him by the power of God's Word. White (1985, p. 21) recognized this stewardship role in servant leadership when she stated, "Heaven is watching to see how those occupying positions of influence fulfill their stewardship. The demands upon them as stewards are measured by the extent of their influence. In their treatment of their fellowmen, they should be as fathers just, tender and true. They should be Christ-like in character, uniting with their brethren in the closest bonds of unity and fellowship."

The apostles were also servant leaders. After the Holy Spirit descended on them, they received power from God to lead as Jesus led. When there were differences between Hebrew and Greek Jews, the apostle decided to choose seven deacons to minister to their needs (Acts 6:1-7) while they themselves continued in the service of preaching the Word of God. They continued to visit the believers in their homes and break bread together (Acts 2:42-47). They also prayed for the sick and they were healed (Acts 3:1-11).

Spiritual Leadership

Jesus Christ showed His disciples that His leadership is a spiritual one. He said that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). His teachings and preaching were to help people grow in their spiritual relationship with God. He told His disciples that they

will receive power to lead the church in the right teaching if the Holy Spirit comes upon them (Acts 1:8). Sanders (1989, p. 26) notes, "The spiritual leader, however, influences others not by the power of his own personality alone but by that personality irradiated, interpenetrated, and empowered by the Holy Spirit." Blanchard (2016) supports this argument by saying, leadership is first a spiritual matter of the heart. Whenever one has an opportunity to influence other people's thinking and behavior, one first need to decide whether to act out of self-interest or to benefit those you are leading.

A spiritual leader influences other people by allowing his personality to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. As Sanders (1989 p 26) explains, "Because he permits the Holy Spirit's undisputed control of his life, the Spirit's power can flow unhindered through him to others." As a result, others are also empowered to lead spiritually.

According to Sanders (1994), p. 28), spiritual leaders are appointed by God. The author further argues, "Spiritual leaders are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or church assemblies. God alone makes them. One does not become a spiritual leader by merely filling an office, taking course work in the subject or resolving in one's own will to do this task. A person must qualify to be a spiritual leader."

According to Blanchard (2016), Jesus practiced five key habits in His leadership. The first habit that Jesus practiced was abiding in God's love. Jesus said, His Father loves him because he kept the Father's commandment (John 15:10). Hence this was one of central habits that Jesus practiced. The other four habits are experiencing solitude (Mark 6:46), practicing prayer (Luke 9:28), knowing and applying scripture (Luke 4:16-19) and maintaining supportive relationship (Luke 9:28). Adopting these habits is essential for those who seek to follow Jesus as role model in leadership.

According to Blackaby (2011), spiritual leadership is costly. Jesus mentioned several times to His disciples the cost of following him. When His disciples were struggling about the first place in Jesus' kingdom, He asked them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38). In other words, Jesus was telling His disciples that sitting on His left or right hand will involve suffering.

This is because suffering and being servant are part of part of Jesus life.

Leadership, both servant and spiritual, requires certain essential qualities. Without these qualities, a leader will not make progress in his or her leadership role. Sanders (1989) categorizes these qualities into two groups. The first group of essential qualities for a leaders includes discipline, vision, wisdom, decision, courage, humility, integrity and sincerity. Commenting on the role of humility in leadership, he states, Humility is the hallmark of the man God can use, although it is not in the world's curriculum. A spiritual leader of today is one who expresses his humility by working gladly and faithfully. Kouzes and Posner (2017) add, credibility as one of the quality needed for a leader. In fact, they say that it is the foundation of leadership.

Sanders' (1989) second category of essential qualities for leaders includes humor, anger, patience, friendship, tact and diplomacy, inspirational power, executive ability, listening and the art of letter writing. He expressed the importance of humor when he said, Humor is a great asset in missionary life. It is invaluable as a lubricant. Indeed it is a most serious deficiency if a missionary lacks a sense of humor. With regard to anger, he states, "Righteous wrath is no less noble than love since both coexist in God. Each necessitates the other. It was Jesus' love for the man with a withered hand that aroused His anger against those who would deny him healing. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), a leader fosters collaboration by creating a climate of trust, facilitating relationships, enhancing self-determination, and developing competence and confidence in their followers. Sanders (1989) further emphasized the importance of inspirational power for a leader. He noted that "The power of inspiring others to service and sacrifice will mark God's leader. His incandescence sets those around him alight." P 82 He further stressed the importance of letter writing for a leader by stating that, any position of leadership involves a considerable amount of correspondence, and letters are self-revealing. We know more of the real Paul from his letters than from any historical material. They combine felicity of expression, freshness of thought, moral integrity, and intellectual honesty.

Methodology

Design

The study used the descriptive design. The sources of data for this study were interviews and documents. Twenty-five church leaders, pastors and members participated willingly in the interviews conducted.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through the thematic approach. According to O'Leary (2010), analysis of qualitative data follows the thematic approach in the sense that similar themes are brought together from the data.

Ethical Considerations

Because of the limited scope of the study, only verbal permission was secured from the church leadership to conduct the study. The church leaders were explained the purpose of the study and its contribution for understanding the work of the church in South Sudan. The individual church leaders and church members who were interviewed registered their informed consent freely without any coercion.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the results of the study, using the research questions to guide the process.

Research question 1: How did the Seventh-day Adventist Church start in South Sudan?

This research question sought to establish how the Seventh-day Adventist Church was started in South Sudan. According to Ogillo et al. (2021), the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially established in South Sudan in the year 1979. However, before this time, few believers that had received the advent message from Uganda and Ethiopia were meeting in various locations in the country for prayers in the name of Seventh day Adventists. These believers showed their faithfulness by sending their tithes to churches in Uganda, Ethiopia, or Kenya where the church leadership existed. They began to correspond with the then Afro-Mid East Division leadership of the Adventist church in Beirut, Lebanon. The correspondents resulted in the sending of a Tanzanian pastor Daudi Ogillo to officially start the work of the church in Juba, South Sudan.

Following the arrival of the Tanzanian Pastor to start the work of the church in Juba in 1979, an American doctor called Gerald Whitehouse was also sent to

start Medical and Humanitarian work in the country. He registered an organization called Seventh-day Adventist World Service (SAWS), which later became known as Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). The doctor also started the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Clinic at Munuki in Juba. Thus, the evangelistic work led by the Tanzanian Pastor and the Humanitarian and Medical work led by the American doctor gave impetus to the work of the church in South Sudan. According to Ogillo et al. (2021), "Daudi Ogillo was the first Adventist missionary to South Sudan. He was a person who had good rapport with government officials, which made his ministry and leadership easier. As a leader, he trained local people for sustainability of the work. The same was true of Dr. Gerald Whitehouse, who also showed diligence in his work. The two leaders worked very hard and sacrificially, showing that they were indeed spiritual and servant leaders.

Research question 2: What are factors that contributed to church growth during the non-indigenous leadership in South Sudan?

This research question sought to establish factors that affected the progress of the work of the non-indigenous church leaders in South Sudan. This study found out that the non-indigenous leaders had worked hard to establish the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Sudan. However, they faced challenges that made their work difficult. One of the factors that affected the church growth during the period of the indigenous leaders was the distance of the Division and Union headquarters from the country. According Working Policy of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2018-2019), a Division is a regional office established "by action of the General Conference Executive Committee at Annual Councils and assigned general administrative and supervisory responsibilities for designated group of unions and other church units within specific geographic areas. The same policy defines union as a group of local conferences/missions/fields, within a designated area that has been organized in harmony with the General Conference Policy and granted, by action of the General Conference Executive Committee, official status as a Seventh-day Adventist union conference/mission. The Division in charge of the work in South Sudan was Trans-European Division whose headquarters was in London, Great Britain. Meanwhile, the Union that oversaw the work in South Sudan was Middle East Union whose headquarters was in Beirut, Lebanon. Due to such a

distance, Division and Union leaders did not visit the church in South Sudan frequently. This had negative effected the church growth because quick decision making for certain projects was not possible. For example, the training of forty-five South Sudanese pastors with BA in Pastoral Ministry, from Middle East University, had to wait until the beginning of 2003 (Interview with one of the Leaders). This means that leadership development for South Sudanese pastors had delayed and as a result church growth in terms of membership slowed down.

The second factor that led to the slow growth of the church was lack of trained indigenous pastors to oversee the work of evangelism and church growth. Though some indigenous people were sent to Nile Union Academy (NUA) in Cairo, Egypt and some to Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon in 1980s, it took years for them to graduate and come back to work for the church. Those who went to NUA took four years in academy and another four years in the college before returning to the country. Those who went to the Middle East University took four to five years before graduating and coming back home to join the team. However, the non-indigenous leaders together with locally trained evangelists continued to move the work forward. The effect is that the church continued to grow but in a slow pace (interview with One Leader).

The third factor that affected the growth of the church is cultural differences. Non-indigenous leaders came from different cultures, including the Western ones. Because they cannot speak the local languages, they had to be translated when they communicated the gospel message. Though the responses of the local people were mostly positive, there were communication barriers between them and the local people (interview with one of the church members).

The fourth factor that affected the church growth in South Sudan was Civil War. The war started in 1983, just three years after the church was established in Juba (interview with one of the church members). The war resulted in the movement of the headquarters of the church from Juba, in the South to Khartoum, in the North because the missionaries could no longer stay in the war zone. While this move made the church to move to the north where the majority are Muslims, it hampered the growth of the church (interview with a Church Leader). The good news is that South Sudanese who fled to the

north were able to get the Advent message from there (interview with a Pastor). Due to wars, some of the members who were converted in Juba got scattered, some traveled to the North and others took refuge in the neighboring countries (interview with a Pastor). This caused church leaders to follow them and minister to them wherever they fled. as a result, the church continued to grow.

Other factors that affected church growth during the non-indigenous leaders include poor economy, lack of well-developed infrastructure, communication challenges due to lack of mobile phones, language barriers, and religious restrictions especially in the northern part of the country when it was still a united Sudan. Poor economy affected the church negatively because the church members' financial contribution was so little that it couldn't support the work without external support (interview with a Leader). Lack of well-developed infrastructure affected the church negatively because workers who travelled from one place to another were delayed by poor road system. Because telephone system was not well developed, workers could not communicate easily with one another and with the head office. Religious restrictions were especially serious in the northern part of the country because it was dominated by Islam. The authorities in the north did not give permission to church leaders for them to acquire land for building churches (interview with a Church Leader).

Research question 3: What are factors that contributed to church growth during the indigenous leadership in South Sudan?

This research question sought to establish factors that contributed to church growth during the administration of the indigenous church leaders in South Sudan.

The study found that the Adventist church leadership in South Sudan remained under the leadership of the non-indigenous leaders from 1979 to 2011, a period of thirty-two years (interview with a Church Leader). During this period, the church grew from few hundreds of members to sixteen thousand members (Interview with One Leader).

Since 2012, the church has been led by indigenous people. In this period, the church membership grew from 16,000 to 67,751, with an increase of 51,751 members within the period of 10 years (Annual Statistical Report, 2023). The leadership implication here is that indigenous leaders, like their

predecessors, applied the servant leadership style in their administration. These leaders include Dr. Clement Arkangelo Mawa, who served as Field President, Attached Territory President and currently the Union president. Another leader is Pastor Daniel Ogwok who served as Field Secretary, Field President, Attached Territory Secretary and currently Union Executive Secretary (Annual Statistical Report, 2023). These leaders together with the leaders sacrificially worked to help the church reach its current membership status. Furthermore, the indigenous leaders cared about the spiritual condition of the people they led by organizing spiritual programs that aimed at spiritual growth of pastors and members. For example, on 5th to 15th December, 2017, a Ministerial convention was organized by the leaders for pastors of the South Sudan Attached Territory in Gulu, Uganda. Present at this convention were Dr. and Mrs. Musa Mitekaro, the then ECD Ministerial Secretary and Pastor and Mrs. Jerry Page, the then General Conference Ministerial Secretary (Interview with one Leader).

Research question 4: What is the effect of servant leadership during the time of indigenous leaders in South Sudan?

This research question sought to establish the effect of servant leadership of the indigenous leaders. One of the positive effects is that during the time of indigenous leadership, 41 pastors have been ordained (Interview with One Leader). Some of these pastors have become administrators of the South Sudan Union Mission while others have become leaders of Missions Fields. Through the servant leadership of the non-indigenous leaders, committed spiritual leaders have been raised in local churches to carry on the mission of God. According to Greenleaf (1998), "Servant-leadership emphasizes an emerging approach to leadership—one which puts serving others, including employees, customers, and community, first."

The positive effect of the indigenous leadership includes the increase of membership, institutional development and professional development of pastors. The church currently has 34 primary schools and seven secondary schools (Interview with One Leader). The church has one Relief Organization and one Medical Clinic. They are all situated in the compound of the South Sudan Union Mission (SSUM) headquarters in Block 1, Munuki, Juba,

South Sudan (Seventh-day Adventist Year Book, 2023).

Professional development of pastors and other church workers were started by non-indigenous leaders and continued by indigenous leaders. As of 4th quarter 2023, seven pastors have diplomas, 43 pastors have BA in Theology, seven pastors have master's degrees and one pastor has a Doctor of Ministry degree. Most of these pastors started their pastoral education during the presence of some of the non-indigenous leaders and they completed their studies during the time of indigenous leaders (Interview with One Leader).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following are the conclusions: The establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist church in South Sudan can be traced to the dedicated and sacrificial work of the pioneer missionaries such as Pastor Daudi Ogillo from Tanzania and Dr. Gerald Whitehouse from the United States of America. Besides planting churches, these leaders established humanitarian and medical services which propelled the development of the church in the county.

Various factors affected the work of the non-indigenous leaders during their services in South Sudan. Besides being far from the headquarters of the Division and the Union, they also experienced communication challenges and religious restrictions imposed by the government. Other challenges include civil wars and limited number of leaders to shoulder the work of evangelism and church planting.

Indigenous leaders followed the footsteps of the non-indigenous leaders by applying the principles of servant and spiritual leadership in their administration. As a result, church membership increased. The positive effect of the servant leadership include ordination of 41 pastors, professional development of pastors and other workers and establishment of 34 primary schools.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the current church leadership in South Sudan continue working sacrificially to foster the church growth and development. The leaders should take advantage of the improved ministry condition in the country to accelerate church growth by continuing the practice of Total Member Involvement. The leadership

should prioritize church employees' professional development and church members' self-reliance through regular training.

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