

**THE ROLE OF BIBLE STUDIES ON CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE STUDY OF
ST. PETER KAKOBA CHURCH**

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THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY OF
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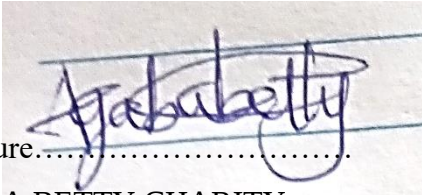


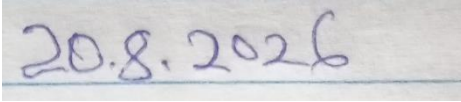
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DECLARATION

I, Agaba Betty Charity, declare that the work presented in this dissertation is original and my own research work to the best of my knowledge and it has never been submitted for any academic award in any institution of higher learning.

Signature.....
AGABA BETTY CHARITY
STUDENT

Date.....

APPROVAL

I approve that this research dissertation has been done under my supervision and is now ready for submission and examination.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edison Kalengyo', with a vertical line drawn below the end of the signature.

Signature:

Date 20th August 2026

REV. CANON PROF. EDISON KALENGYO
SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the congregation of St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, whose faithful pursuit of God's Word inspired this study, and to all pastors and church leaders who labour tirelessly to ground believers in the scriptures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to God Almighty for granting me the wisdom, strength, and perseverance to undertake and complete this research journey.

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To the leadership and congregation of St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, Ankole Diocese - thank you for your openness, cooperation, and willingness to participate in this study. Your testimonies and experiences form the heartbeat of this work.

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To all who contributed in any way - through prayer, encouragement, or practical assistance - I offer my heartfelt thanks. May this work serve the growth of the Church and the glory of God.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of Bible studies on Church growth with a case study of St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, Ankole Diocese. The study was guided by the following specific objectives: to assess the current state of Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church; to assess the contribution of Bible studies to the growth of Christians at St. Peter Kakoba Church; and to examine the challenges faced by the Church in running Bible studies and propose strategies to improve participation.

The study utilized a qualitative research approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews with church leaders and questionnaires administered to Christians who both regularly attend and those who do not attend the mid-week Bible study programme.

The study found that St. Peter Kakoba Church had a low and decreasing Bible study program attended by the majority of Christians who knew it exists. Most people affirmed that bible study programs are theologically necessary for Christian development, growth and ability to distinguish right doctrine from error.

They affirmed that there are several challenges contributing to this low attendance like being busy with work, the content perceived as irrelevant, weak and inconsistent promotion, bad timing and poor facilitation and that Christians who attended showed notable spiritual growth like increase in the Word of God knowledge, prayer life and in repelling false teachings.

The study concluded that a Bible study program, which is well organized and intentionally facilitated, helps significantly in the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church. St. Peter Kakoba Church was encouraged to review its bible study curriculum, improve facilitation methods, establish an inviting environment for all age groups, create follow-up mechanisms and have an element of accountability for all who attend. The Church leadership was challenged to not take Bible study as an extracurricular activity but a pastoral priority, that so the people might grow in the Word of God.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

There is a growing perception that Bible studies participation is fast becoming a challenge for most Christians today. This development motivated this study to look into the week - day Bible study program of the Church with St. Peter Kakoba Church as a study Case.

There are diverse challenges facing the Church recently affecting Church growth. The scripture is the reservoir of knowledge which needs to be dug and found for the betterment of the Christian. With this, it can be argued that both the growing knowledge in scripture and scarce knowledge of God's word have great effect on Church growth.

Bible study in this sense is distinct from biblical studies, which is a formal academic discipline¹. The significance of Bible Studies cannot be ignored in Christianity. Bible Studies serve as the source through which Christians know their God and His will for their lives. Many adherents believe the Bible covers deep spiritual principles, and the rewards for its careful and thoughtful study are enormous. They also believe that, through Bible Studies, Christians learn how they could live a more fulfilling and relevant life in the society. The Bible also directs Christians on how they could become more like the image of God and Jesus Christ².

Preliminary Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to survey existing scholarship on Bible studies and Church growth in order to establish a theoretical foundation for the present study, identify what has already been investigated, and locate the gap in knowledge that this research seeks to address. The review draws on theological, historical, and empirical sources to contextualize the role of scripture engagement in the life and growth of the Church.

Scholars have long affirmed the centrality of scripture to Christian formation. T. Norton Sterrett argues that the Bible is indispensable to the believer's spiritual development, asserting that

¹ Derham, A. Morgan. *Christian's Guide Series Book 3: A Christian's Guide to Bible Study*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1963.

² Harris, Stephen L. *Understanding the Bible: A Reader's Introduction*. Mayfield Publishing Company, 1985.

Christians cannot fulfil their God-given purposes if the Bible remains neglected.³ This position is grounded in key biblical texts: in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, God commands the study of His Word; in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the Apostle Paul describes scripture as God-breathed and profitable for teaching and correction; and in Hebrews 4:12, the Bible is described as living and active. These passages collectively underscore the theological conviction that engagement with the Word of God is not optional but foundational to Christian life and growth.⁴

On the authority and sufficiency of scripture, Alister McGrath contends that the Bible contains the whole counsel of God and that everything necessary for salvation and Christian living is either explicitly stated or can be derived from it. McGrath further argues that Christ can be known definitively only through scripture, and that the Church has consistently regarded the Bible as the authoritative source of its foundational beliefs and values.⁵ This theological grounding has practical implications for Church life: a congregation that is deeply rooted in the Word is better equipped to discern sound doctrine, resist false teaching, and grow in faith and maturity.

In tracing the historical development of the Bible, Dennis Bratcher notes that the scriptural canon evolved over many centuries, with the Old Testament taking its definitive shape after Israel's return from Babylonian exile around 500-450 BC, and attaining official form in Judaism at the Council of Jamnia in AD 90.⁶ Understanding this historical formation is relevant to the study of Bible literacy because it demonstrates that the Church has always been in the business of transmitting and interpreting scripture to each generation. When that transmission is interrupted - whether by low participation in teaching programs or by biblical illiteracy - Church growth is adversely affected.

Despite the breadth of scholarship affirming the importance of Bible study, there is a notable gap in context-specific research examining how structured mid-week Bible study programs operate within local African church settings, and how their attendance or neglect concretely affects Church growth. Riley observes that biblical illiteracy is on the rise globally, signaling an urgent need for

³ T. Norton Strerrett, *How to Understand Your Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: University Press, 1974), 13.

⁴ Harris, *Understanding the Bible 8th ed.*, 14.

⁵ Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The intellectual coherence of evangelicalism* (Downers, Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Press, 1996).

⁶ Bratcher, *The Development of the Bible*, Retrieved on December 20, 2016.

local churches to develop intentional strategies for scripture engagement.⁷ This study contributes to filling that gap by focusing on St. Peter Kakoba Church, where the mid-week Bible study program is experiencing low participation. The existing literature provides a strong theological and historical basis for understanding why Bible studies matter; what it does not yet offer is an empirical examination of the specific factors impeding participation in this particular congregation and the consequent effect on Church growth. It is this gap that the present research seeks to address.

Statement of the Problem

The mid-week Bible study program at St. Peter Kakoba Church is facing a serious challenge. A majority of Christians do not attend this church program that is supposed to ground them in the word of God. Because of this condition, Christians have remained stunted in their spiritual growth. When Christians become stagnant in their spiritual growth, they are not able to sieve the chaff of doctrine that is parading the borders of Christianity. The Church strategically instituted the Bible study program to aid believers to grow in their faith and to clearly differentiate truth from error. If this condition remains unchecked, then it will continue affect the Church in many ways, especially, their knowledge of scriptures. As James Riley⁸ lamented that “*biblical illiteracy is on the rise*” this should sound as a wakeup call to pastors and leaders of the Church to rise up and develop strategies to avert this situation in order not to hinder the growth of the Church. This study therefore assessed the role of Bible studies on Church growth, with specific study of St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, Ankole Diocese.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the current state of the Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church.
2. To assess the contribution of Bible studies to the growth of Christians at St. Peter Kakoba Church.
3. To examine the challenges faced by the Church in running the Bible studies and the consequent strategies to improve the performance of the Bible studies in Church.

⁷ Riley (2016). The Voice. Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians. www.crivoice.org/bibledate.html Retrieved on December 20, 2016.

⁸ Riley (2016). The Voice. Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians. www.crivoice.org/bibledate.html Retrieved on December 20, 2016.

Research Questions

1. What is the current state of the Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church?
2. What is the contribution of Bible studies to the growth of Christians at St. Peter Kakoba Church?
3. What are the challenges faced by the Church in running the Bible studies and the consequent strategies to improve the performance of the Bible studies in Church?

Significance of the study

The study investigated the issues that are causing the members of St. Peter Kakoba Church from participating in their mid - week Bible studies program.

The study will help to underscore how a well-planned Bible studies program could impact Church growth.

Also, the study is useful to the Church leaders who are having challenges in their Bible studies programs and are therefore, not able to influence their congregation with the scriptures as they wish. The study enlightens such pastors and Church leaders to develop strategies to avert the situation.

Furthermore, future researchers who may be interested in this area of research will use it as a reference. The findings in this research will help them understand the current trend of challenges eluding believers of biblical knowledge.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables.

The study undertook a qualitative research design to do data collection and then data analysis of the field findings from the area of study. This approach provided a broad insight into multifaceted social phenomena by establishing an appropriate and background understanding offered by

qualitative inquiries⁹. This approach of the methodology brought together several key elements that applied to this area of study of the impact of Bible studies on Church growth.

Population

This research, being a practical and Biblical study, the researcher collected data from the field (St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda) through the Bible Study leader, Church leaders (The Parish priest, Lay reader and Head of Laity) and the Christians.

Sampling Techniques

Simple random sampling technique. This will be used to select Christians

Purposive sampling technique. This will be used to select the Bible study leader and Church leaders.

Data collection methods and instruments

As a way of ensuring that the collected data addresses the study objectives, the data collection instruments were selected appropriately to avoid collecting irrelevant information (Odongo, 2013).

Questionnaire

In this study, questionnaire was prepared for purposes of obtaining data from the respondents. The questionnaire items comprised of closed-ended and open-ended items to offer and give the advantage of collecting both qualitative and quantitative information. This tool was used to collect data from Christians; especially those who regularly participate in the bible study program and those who do not participate.

Interview Guide

The researcher also collected data using interview method to explore and probe to get facts concerning the practice and virtue of bible study and its impact on the spiritual growth of Christians. This method was used to collect data from the Bible study leader and Church leaders (parish priest, lay reader and the Head of laity).

Data Analysis

Since the study is descriptive, the researcher mainly used descriptive statistics during data analysis.

⁹ John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell (2018). Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, Department of Psychology, Carnegie Mellon University.

Data analysis commenced with editing and correction to remove mistakes from the collected data and still eliminate the blank spaces left unfilled by the respondents.

Limitations

This study acknowledged the following technical limitations that affected the collection, interpretation, and generalizability of its findings:

Small and localized sample size. The study was confined to a single congregation, St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, Ankole Diocese. The relatively small sample drawn from this one setting somehow limited the statistical power of the findings and restricted the extent to which conclusions were generalized to other churches or dioceses in Uganda or beyond.

Time and resource constraints. The data collection phase was scheduled within a narrow window of approximately two weeks in May 2026. This compressed timeframe limited the depth and breadth of the data gathered, particularly regarding longitudinal trends in Bible study attendance and Church growth.

Research ethics

During the study, the researcher observed the following research ethics:

Informed consent. Participation in this study was voluntary, and the researcher sought consent from the respondents before collecting data from them. This was done by first explaining the relevance of the study to the respondents.

Copyright and patent right rules. Every work obtained from another source was cited and quoted as to observe copyright and patent rules as well as academic integrity.

Confidentiality. The data collected by the researcher through the primary tools was not disclosed elsewhere, but was only used for academic purposes.

Time-frame

The study was carried out over a period of seven months.

In the first three months (January to March 2026), the researcher focused on the research proposal and obtaining the necessary academic approvals especially from the research supervisor and the Research ethics committee.

Secondly, in April 2026, the research mainly concentrated on proposal editing and designing data collection tools.

In the first half of the month of May 2026, the research devoted herself to collecting the necessary data from the field. This involved conducting in-depths interviews and administering questionnaires.

The last part of May 2026 was for data analysis and interpretation of the collected data using qualitative means, and subsequently presenting the findings in the draft report.

Finally in June 2026, the researcher will focus on editing and writing the fair copy of the dissertation, and the final submission of the dissertation.

Outline of chapters

The overall study of the role of bible studies on the growth of Church was organized into five chapters.

Chapter one of the work presents the background to the study, the problem statement, literature, research problem, research objectives, research questions, significance, theoretical framework and methodology.

Chapter Two entails the current state of the Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church.,

Chapter Three presents the contribution of Bible studies to the growth of Christians at St. Peter Kakoba Church

Chapter four presents the challenges faced by the Church in running the Bible studies and the consequent strategies to improve the performance of the Bible studies in Church.

Finally, Chapter five provides the conclusion and recommendations by summarizing the main findings into conclusion and give recommendations in line with the research objectives. Recommendations were given for the Church.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CURRENT STATE OF BIBLE STUDIES AT ST. PETER KAKOBA CHURCH

Introduction

This chapter presents data and analysis on the current state of Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, Ankole Diocese, in response to the first research objective. The data was gathered through interviews with church leaders and questionnaires administered to the congregation. The chapter examines the structure and organisation of the Bible study programme, the nature and frequency of sessions, the curriculum in use, levels of attendance, and the general awareness of the programme among congregants.

The evidence from this chapter has drawn on the triangulation of interview accounts from four types of church leader; The Parish Priest, the Lay Reader, the Head of Laity, and the Bible study Leader, complemented by survey data collected from the members of the congregations. The use of this nested methodological approach ensures that the insights do not derive from any particular subject being observed but provides a more complete insight into the function of the bible study in the everyday life of the church. Evidence in this case has supported or in instances contradicted evidence obtained from other methods. Wherever interview evidence appears congruent this has been presented and noted as reinforcing validity, but in instances of evidence appearing contrasting this discrepancy was accepted and explored for significance.

Organisation and structure of the bible study programme

From the interviews with the church leaders of St. Peter Kakoba Church it was established that there has been an organized mid-week Bible study programme in place for a number of years in the parish. As the Parish priest confirmed, the official time in the program schedule for it to take place is every Wednesday evening from approximately one and a half to two hours. As the Lay Reader outlined to us, people of all ages and with all kinds of education were welcome at the program and it was intended as the main means by which the Christians in the parish are perpetually educated.

A bible study leader is in charge of the Bible study group; this is someone who has already had theological training as a layman. The Parish Priest provides theological backup and sometimes

actually leads studies himself, especially in the case of more sensitive theological issues or passages. Head of Laity said the Bible study program falls under the overall Pastoral plan for the church. The Head of Laity spoke of the vision in the church's Pastoral plan of scripture literate people who can apply their bible to their daily lives and resist false doctrines.

The church does not currently have a set standardized published Bible study program; the bible study leader determines which books and passages of the bible the group will be studying from week to week and/or month to month. When selecting readings, the bible study leader takes into consideration times and feast days in the church calendar and any topical issues facing members of the congregation and the Sunday lectionary cycle. I believe that since there is not a specific systemized plan each week there is not much flow and thematic unity from week to week and a systematic progression through scripture. Fee and Stuart highlight the fact that a deliberate and planned process for understanding scripture is necessary to achieve biblical literacy¹⁰.

In regard to the history of the mid-week Bible study at St. Peter Kakoba Church, it was initiated over ten years ago by mandate from the diocese to all the parishes in Ankole Diocese; they were requested to begin a process of scripture engagement outside of Sunday services. The Parish Priest stated that when the Bible study was launched, it had quite a bit of momentum and the initial support group included the Lay Reader, two churchwardens and a few committed layman who were present to organize it. However, the planning group dissolved fairly early and as a result a single Bible study leader is the person who is responsible for the bible study group today with very little backup or organization from others. As the Head of Laity stated, there were a few other mid-week programs which saw similar initial involvement from parish leaders which have now faded and dissolved, but the process of institutional support and then gradual disbandment was evident in all of them and this is explained as being mostly due to lack of capacity of the leadership.

As for materials, the church has relied on participants bringing their own Bibles and the bible study leader having printed out copies to hand out for most times, these handouts were sometimes made

¹⁰ Fee, Gordon D. & Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 27.

from material borrowed from neighboring parishes from denominational publishing resources. There is no line item in the church's annual budget for bible study program needs (such as published study guides, notebooks for new members, or for a small sound system for when the crowd is too large for the space provided) and historically, any requests made to the church administration have been dealt with on an ad hoc basis. The Lay Reader pointed out that the lack of planned, consistent resources has implicitly indicated low program priority despite leaders' unanimous recognition of the high spiritual priority of the Bible study.

With regard to leadership qualifications, the current Bible study leader came into his position four years ago on the recommendation of the previous Parish Priest based on his personal knowledge of the Bible and longevity of faithfulness to the church rather than any formal, diocesan recognized teaching qualification. He has not received any formal training in adult education or facilitation, a fact to which he freely admitted during the interview process. The lack of a clear, documented process of selecting and training Bible study leaders—a process which would outline expectations, mentorship, and provide refresher training—is an additional organizational weakness found in this study and bears on the sustainability of the program beyond the individual leader.

Several interviewees also commented on the lack of explicit discussion of the distinct doctrinal and liturgical heritage of the Anglican Communion in the current ad hoc curriculum, where instead the program tends to focus on generic evangelical themes derived from whatever materials the present leader happens to have available. Church leaders admitted that this is a lost opportunity—St. Peter Kakoba Church, as a parish within the Church of Uganda, inherited a strong tradition of scripture study which is anchored in the Book of Common Prayer and the lectionary cycle. These historical texts could ground the Bible study program doctrinally, provide an inherent structure for the study of scripture throughout the church year, and create a common theological experience, but they are largely absent from the current program of study.

More structured, sequence-based Bible study curricula, according to information informally shared by the Lay Reader via diocesan clergy contacts, have resulted in more sustained attendance levels in neighbor parishes in Ankole Diocese. For example, a nearby parish has an on-going rotating 3-year curriculum featuring a broad-range of biblical books, supplemented with materials that are printed at the diocesan level and distributed to participating parishes. Church leaders at St. Peter

Kakoba, who indicated interest in adopting a similar curriculum, said that doing so would require diocesan support in acquiring the materials and institutionalized willingness to embrace Bible study as a corner-stone, rather than an ancillary, part of parish ministry.

Another dimension of the organizational weakness is found in the lack of communication between Bible study leaders and broader parish structures, including the Parish Council and synod representatives. According to multiple interviewees, there are almost never discussions of the Bible study program in official parish council meetings; instead, all discussion is focused on physical structure, finance, and Sunday worship logistics. Bible study is virtually absent from the parish decision-making processes, and its continuation and development are highly dependent on individual leaders.

The lack of systematic records and organizational storage provides an additional indicator of organizational neglect. The Bible study leader indicated he keeps his sermon notes and attendance records in his own notebook, which he keeps with him at all times. This workbook is neither shared nor evaluated by any other leader in the parish, meaning that if this particular individual either misplaces the book or is unable to continue with his leadership responsibilities, no trace of what was taught and to whom will remain in an institutional record.

These points of weakness in Bible study leadership, curriculum, support, and communication with parish structures contribute to the overall theme that the mid-week Bible study at St. Peter Kakoba Church survives by the sheer will and dedication of committed individuals. While this dedication must be lauded and encouraged, programs that rely on a dedicated group of volunteers are inherently fragile, and subsequent chapters of this research will build upon the idea of transferring that individual dedication into structures which may enhance program sustainability.

Attendance Patterns and Awareness

One of the most significant findings from the data is the persistent and troubling decline in attendance at the mid-week Bible study. When asked to describe the current state of attendance, the Parish Priest stated:

“The attendance at our Bible study is very discouraging. We used to have a good number of people when the programme was first started, but today you may come

and find only ten to fifteen people out of a congregation of over three hundred. It is a situation that worries me greatly as a pastor.”

The Bible study facilitator corroborated this image by explaining that while the core audience typically consists of elderly women along with a few dedicated lay leaders, young adults, working men, and teenagers were notably missing from the meeting. This tendency in the mid-week program was reflective of many churches in Uganda, where competing work, family and businesses prevented many from attending mid-week services.

Despite the relatively low numbers, questionnaire responses suggest a relatively widespread knowledge of the program. A clear majority of Christians who responded stated that they were aware that the church ran a mid-week study meeting. Most reported learning about it from a notice made during Sunday services, while a few had observed it on the notice board. Even fewer had been verbally invited by the facilitators or another member.

Analysis of the available attendance information suggests an even greater skew; older women, particularly those over the age of 50 formed the bulk of regular participants and many stated that they had attended the program regularly for more than 5 years; at the other extreme the facilitators' comments regarding male participants of working-age suggested this attendance was very poor indeed, and for those aged under thirty (that is, youth), attendance was “non-existent... outside of festive times”. There were a few incidental comments on the questionnaires regarding the nature of discussion content, whereby many participants remarked that discussion would center around topics relating to the experience of older women, a topic that may reduce a perception of relevance to many young and male attendees.

Comparatively, the Head of Laity observed that the weekly Lenten bible study series was often very well attended, some up to forty individuals per meeting. Given the similar content and a focus on scripture – one only as long as a total 6 weeks and actively advertised each year - it's reasonable to infer that attendance is not related to an absolute lack of interest in bible study per se, but perhaps an issue with the promotion, timing and sense of urgency surrounding the regular mid-week service: People attend the lent bible study because they want it since they will never see it again except next year. The weekly bible study is there always so why not next week'!

The other observation regarding bible study was the response of those to whom the following questions were posed when asked to rate the importance of bible study in their Christian spiritual life. The options were low importance, medium importance and high importance, and a large majority, even some who indicated they do not currently participate, rated bible study to be of high importance. This contrast between the high value attributed to bible study in general and the low attendance for the midweek Bible study highlights the issue as one of ‘motivation,’ not a crisis of conscience regarding value.

One of the other factors that emerged was the issue of transport, and of particular consequence for elderly members living away from the central church location. When asking elderly women who did not attend they cited two primary reasons; safety (walking home alone, especially during the rains and heavy sun shines, is problematic) and a dependence upon costly boda-boda transport. Thus it seems that the provision of mid-week Bible study centres in various zones close to congregants may offer a solution.

Finally, the facilitator offered his perspective on the attendance issue: he suggested that low attendance may not just be a logistical or structural issue, but one of ‘spiritual fatigue’ among the wider church body: “Sometimes I just wonder if the people get too comfortable. You see, at home, when someone wants the word, they must open their Bible. But at church on Sunday is safe and sound, so bible study requires effort, opening your Bible.

It was also revealed that people always like to settle down after a certain point, such responses highlight that while administrative solutions may be necessary, they may not necessarily provide all the required answers.

Frequency, duration, and setting of sessions

Interview data revealed that Bible study sessions are held once a week on Wednesday evenings, a scheduling decision that has not been reviewed since the programme was established. Several church leaders acknowledged that the Wednesday evening slot presents difficulties for many working-class congregants who may be fatigued after the day’s work or who have family responsibilities in the evenings. The Lay Reader noted:

“Wednesday evenings are difficult for many people. The men are tired from work, the women are busy with children and cooking, and for the youth, there are other programmes. We have never sat down as leaders to ask ourselves whether this time is still the best time for our congregation.”

So as regards the scheduling the meetings, all respondents with reservations expressed the view that some adjustment to the timing of Bible study meetings, if it were possible without major disruption to church operations, could further increase participation. One option suggested by some was to divide bible studies in to zone groups and these meetings can take place on rotation at some church allocated facilities within individual zones or at home bible studies as it would possibly encourage greater participation especially by working women with children or the elderly who are mobile challenged.

Apart from Scheduling issues already raised some also raised concern about how some Bible study meetings were conducted in relation to what would be expected by such kind of meetings. According to the person who led most of the sessions, there has been a consistent format. This typically include; the start of the session with song and prayer, followed by reading of the scripture, then teaching of the passage largely done by the Bible study facilitator, brief time for discussion/questions and ending with a prayer.

Participants with concerns indicate that often there was limited time for participants to actually read and interact with the scripture themselves in order to grapple with it personally, and rather most of the time during their meetings the facilitated leader spends more of their meeting time teaching. That the meetings are normally held for at least one and a half hours; the Bible study facilitator would spend more of that time teaching, but very short, and thus passive learning of the session in all aspects of how it would be conducted.

Regarding the space used for Bible study meetings; there is a stark difference between the one held in the main hall, (at times also known as sanctuary) and those of some other women/youth fellowships within the church, such as mother’s union, youth fellowship which are sometimes held in small side rooms or in the open compound beneath the tree in good weather. Because the church’s main halls are designed for larger congregational services, rather than for smaller meetings in which interaction and dialogue are expected to flourish even if it was not been

previously examined by leadership. As a result those smaller churches may feel they encourage more open dialogue among their congregations by holding meetings in suitable spaces. However for St Peter's church the size and dynamics of the main church are such that they may encourage their congregational members not to engage well as they tend to expect formal teaching.

Other aspects other than logistics. In relation to the language there are also other factors that are not evident through attendance figures, but through communication. Even though majority of users understand and relate to Runyankole language, the young people in particular some educated ones said they might prefer reading both in the English and Runyankole version of the Bible for more complex concepts and understanding. The Bible study leader sometimes borrowed study materials from other denominations in English and at times, found it extremely difficult to effectively translate them to Runyankole on time for use within the meeting leading to improvised teaching sessions.

There is no existing register to track the attendees. Due to lack of record on those who attend each week/meeting it is difficult for the church to carryout following up of those who stop coming. Simple attendance record sheet by the leaders (Bible study facilitator and/or the Parish Priest) will offer invaluable tool for proper programming and management of the biblical education offered by the church to its congregants.

Summary

A number of the factors discussed above indicated a sense that while St. Peter Kakoba has continued to maintain a regular Bible Study program this is on-going more of in structural existence rather than actual engagement. The bible Study is officially supported by the Church, run by leadership from the Church as well as having proper church based programming at regularly designated times, but this has been characterized by low, unrepresentative congregation based attendance and it currently operates on without a consistent follow through structure in its delivery format, without adequate assessment of the scheduling based on congregational dynamics. This framework sets the tone from which to consider contributions of the Church's Bible study towards its growth and the role that identified constraints can possibly be deterring this.

The findings discussed reflect that problems faced by the biblical programs and for which there is not one answer, but rather a combination of shortcomings in the way it is coordinated and

implemented which have piled up over the years, thus affecting its success. In overcoming this approach will require attention not to just scheduling arrangements, but on underlying principles relating to how resources should be utilized, what ought to be curriculum delivery approach in terms of structure, and how the Parish can support this initiative through adequate pastoral commitment.

Nevertheless, the fact of the Bible Study's enduring through more than a decade of structural flaws is largely a demonstration of the devotion of its most enthusiastic volunteers and most passionate attendants and also signals that potential does already exist with a core of mature church followers and academically engaged individuals. The fact also worth of mention is that most structural cracks (no curriculum guidelines, not yet organized resourcing, and unstructured succession plans for leadership) observed at St Peter Kakoba's bible studies is typical in most of medium size churches, where administrative systems capacity is often constrained. It means that strategies will be required that will be relevant for not only St. Peter Kakoba, but for any other church with similar circumstances with capacity challenges that is willing to adopt and adapt.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTRIBUTION OF BIBLE STUDIES TO THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIANS AT ST. PETER KAKOBA CHURCH

Introduction

This chapter presents data and analysis on the contribution of Bible studies to the growth of Christians at St. Peter Kakoba Church, responding to the second research objective. Christian growth in this research work includes both the numerical and physical growth, (individual development) maturity in biblical knowledge, togetherness within themselves the church's abilities to grow both numerical and retain its members). The study through questionnaires and interviews conducted with the church leadership and on Christianity's, specifically focuses on the witness account testimony, of a consistent bible's studies attending Christians.

It should be mentioned that leading question to solicit witness testimonies of this kind did not produce the results or responses obtained. This is so because members were left to give accounts freely on any positive impacts on their biblical life and relationship with God if any caused by studying the bible through bible studies program on how they were challenged. The consistency and specificity of many of the stories, several of them confirmed independently by several more than one Christian's on the effects on the similar persons.

Spiritual growth and scriptural literacy

Among the Christians who regularly attend the Bible study programme at St. Peter Kakoba Church, the most consistently reported benefit was growth in spiritual understanding and scriptural literacy. When asked whether Bible study had impacted their faith, the majority of regular attendees responded affirmatively and with considerable conviction. One long-serving Bible study participant, a woman in her fifties who has attended the programme for over a decade, shared the following:

“Before I joined the Bible study, I could sit in church every Sunday and listen to the preacher but not really understand what the Bible was saying. The Bible study taught me how to read scripture for myself. Now when I read the Bible at home, I can understand it and apply it to what is happening in my life. That has made my faith much stronger.”

This testimony is consistent with McGrath's argument that the authority of scripture becomes meaningful in the lives of believers only as they directly and consistently interact with it. Scripture is not just a theological statement or doctrine to be accepted or affirmed; it is a living text to be encountered, to be wrestled with and applied in the lives of its readers. It appears that the bible study program when implemented effectively actually creates this kind of sustained intentional interaction with the word¹¹.

Responses from church leaders during interviews corroborated these findings. The Parish Priest stated that Christians who attend bible study regularly demonstrate a substantially greater clarity of doctrine than those who only attended Sunday service. It was his opinion that bible study regulars are more likely to ask theologically significant questions, critically interact with sermons and recognize deviation from biblical teaching. It was also his opinion that the Head of Laity found that bible study attendees are able to engage in conversations about their faith more confidently with non-Christians, becoming more effective personal witnesses in the context of the family and wider community.

Many other regulars reiterated this observation in equally important but more discrete language. A retired schoolteacher who has attended the bible study group for six years states that after attending for a period of time she has begun to write a private journal where she records thoughts, questions, and key observations from each week of bible study, and declares she would have never started this practice without the organized study of the group. Another respondent, the mother of four children, claimed that her participation in the bible study group has impacted her ability to pray with her children at home such that rote recitation has been replaced by thoughtful explanation. The responses seem to indicate that the benefits of sustained bible study have a household-wide applicability as the impact is magnified well beyond the scope of the Wednesday night group.

The bible study leader himself identified a distinctive difference in questions posed by regulars versus newly attending people. It was his opinion that new bible study attendees ask predominantly clarifying questions concerning words used by the author or events described in the biblical

¹¹ McGrath, Alister (1996). *A Passion for Truth*. InterVarsity Press.

context. It was his additional opinion that more established bible study attendees ask primarily applicational, and sometimes even critical, questions such as “how can one reconcile this passage with current ethical dilemmas,” or “how do we deal with seemingly incomprehensible passages in light of God’s loving character?”

It is the opinion of the leader that these types of questions reflect a development of deep and rich theological maturity that is only achieved through sustained interaction with the scriptures over years. This view challenges the perception that bible study acts as an educational endeavor rather than a formative one.

This data was also indirectly supported by responses to the questionnaire. When asked unprompted to identify the primary meaning of a short biblical text that was not well-known, Regular bible study attendees were significantly more likely to accurately answer the question with a substantial and contextually appropriate conclusion than those who were not bible study attendees and in many cases respondents did not attempt an answer at all or only included tangentially related material. Though this is not a high stakes biblical literacy test, it serves as an additional, independent confirmation of the qualitative findings regarding the cognitive benefits that appear to accompany participation in regular bible study.

Personal transformation and moral formation

Beyond scriptural literacy, the data revealed that regular Bible study participation has been associated with significant personal transformation among attendees. Several respondents described changes in behaviour, attitudes, and relationships that they directly attributed to their engagement with God’s Word in the Bible study setting. Sterrett’s assertion that the Bible penetrates the spirit, soul, and the thought and intents of the heart was borne out in the testimonies gathered.¹²

A young man who had been attending the Bible study for approximately two years shared:

“I used to have a very bad temper and I was involved in drinking. When I started attending Bible study, the Word started speaking to me about how to treat others

¹²Sterrett, T. Norton (1974). *How to Understand Your Bible*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 45.

and how to honour God with my body. I am not a perfect person, but I am a different person. My wife and children have noticed the change and they are now attending church more regularly because of what they see in me.”

Such testimonies speak of an integral link between the personal spiritual transformation of individuals, and the quantitative growth of the wider church. When encounter with scripture causes tangible, compelling change in the life of a believer, then that believer becomes living testimony and the vehicle through which other persons – neighbors and family members inclusive – are also brought into community in Christ. Growth, in this context becomes less the byproduct of evangelical campaigns and more an organic outworking of biblical formation in a congregation.

A similar testimony was offered by a woman in her forties who was widowed two years ago. Her account of her deep grief in this loss described a period which was sustained and deepened by participation in her small-group bible study than simply through professional pastoral counsel. “The Bible study people did not simply quote a verses at me and walk away,” she explained “they kept coming back to read Psalms with me and over time I began to find out my grief wasn’t the end of my story.” this testimony reveals some aspects of the potential theologically formed community represented by small Bible groups serving informal pastoral roles for instance in contexts where such formal structures are less available and in addition to the informal role it plays in helping believers gain some basic competence in discerning the spiritual meaning.

In relation to practical impact the Lay Reader alluded to several cases in which men involved in small Bible groups subsequently experienced measurable improvements in the practical domains of personal finance and family responsibility; including for instance, in one case, greater regular contribution toward tithes and offerings, and for some others more regular provision for child school fees and household provision. Though such cases often require a multitude of factors and hence this evidence alone cannot support confident, causal conclusions that this programme for these reason alone is responsible for such improvement, the prevalence across respondents suggesting that where there is effective operation and engagement with small Bible groups a wider, and often unarticulated impact seems to occur beyond the private spirituality of individual Christians to touch and bless family and community finances/ responsibility; and, where it does work effectively, it has implications beyond private spiritual life of believers.

Further to this, a couple shared a joint testimony of the ways in which a prolonged marriage conflict was helped along their participation together in a small group discussion based on a passage relating to the need for Forgiveness and reconciliation – The marriage of one couple who were part of one such small group had also resolved a significant and prolonged marriage difficulty through one such discussion, involving a reading about “an unmerciful servant”... after which [the husband commented] ‘we talked for nearly two hours later that week’. Such testimonies show another one less attended dimension of Christian impact from such Bible studies of strengthening of marriage, and implicitly by so doing, support for household structures which constitute so much of the underlying relational health/stability of many such congregations.

Builds community and corporate spiritual health

The most obvious impact on community development and the stimulation of Corporate Spiritual Health arose from responses concerning this aspect of this Programme; where for example the large majority of people in one the study group describe this meeting as the most important opportunity in which they personally get to really get to know and be known by others at some level of intimacy and friendship. Unlike some of the other meetings and services in the Parish, where participants generally know little or very little about people around them, participants said, this meeting provides a place to honestly talk or be really yourself. Participants from at least one group described a fellowship of the journeyers as the fellowship of such groups has come to be referred¹³.

The Lay reader similarly observed the growth of friendships within Bible studies leading to specific, if sometimes relatively minor expressions of practical Christian community including help at bereavement’s; prayer at family ‘crises’ and in some cases the joint working towards justice through common voice to the relevant civic authorities to effect justice in this wider community..

In addition the development of an inner kinship, most long-term Bible study group participants referred to fellow members simply as church family” something which participants said occurred even more spontaneously with fellow participants in their Bible study group than for others who attends formal church services. One participant remarked; the Bible study group offered more

¹³ Derek Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds: Explorations in Pastoral Theology* (Apollos, 1997), 212.

intensive personal fellowship because members were known on the back of specific circumstances of health crisis, poverty and personal problems in the manner which is of nowhere to see any one” elsewhere . One result of this greater knowing of the whole person is the establishment of more robust social networks (community structures) and informal systems of mutual help. For example in at least two small groups, there happens contributions towards supporting funerals, for the hospital bills and for children’s school- fees (both from the informal sharing of resources amongst the group members).

Indeed members in some of those groups have used the Bible study format to informally facilitate wider referral networks to support parish leadership and informal processes for pastoral concerns of issues to be raised within community; this enables referral to be to church leadership on issues where a church minister/ parish priest wouldn’t hear, especially those occurring in private sphere, domestic violence , mental health or other sensitive issues could potentially arise within a confidential small group meeting and be reported for appropriate pastoral assistance well before coming to the attention of the parish leaderships .

The formal welfare committee has received some financial support that have been donated out of the bible group meeting. The group also acted as an initial point of contact for referral processes which have been established informally as mentioned, that would normally have otherwise not found any way of eventually getting to the formal church structure.

Doctrinal discernment and resistance to false teaching

One of the most important of theologically identified contribution of Bible study is to establish and promote confidence among ordinary believers in relation to issues of truth in contemporary Uganda; this including building capacity to effectively resist prosperity gospel, the Neo Prophetic etc., and to critically assess spurious religious claims.

The Parish Priest shared a striking example:

“We had a situation where a visiting preacher came to this area and was teaching things that were not biblical - claiming that God always wants Christians to be rich, and that poverty is a sign of sin or a curse. It was our Bible study members who came to me and said, ‘Pastor, what that man is saying does not match what

the Bible says. ' They were able to point to specific scriptures. That would not have happened if they had not been in the Bible study. '

This evidence illustrates the protective function of the Bible study ministry in the Church's life. A church whose members are knowledgeable in the scripture is a church equipped to withstand manipulation (even spiritual, theological and doctrinal manipulation), drift in belief and loss of faith. In this respect, Bible study not only fosters personal piety, but, as I have already briefly noted, the corporate authenticity of the Church itself.

Beyond the incident described to us by the Parish Priest, many Bible study participants independently referred to their new wariness of religious content they encountered on both television and social media, most of which they referred to, in various words, as theologically shallow or manipulative. One woman explained to us that before she began Bible study, she had regularly sent money to a televised preacher who was asking for contributions for him to promise God's followers financial success. Several months of studying scripture with other believers seemed to have cured this proclivity, for according to her, I stopped giving money to televangelists about six months ago as the Bible study had taught me to compare what preachers say against what the Bible actually teaches. All in all, there was much evidence of this spiritual defense mechanism in the reports from the Bible study's participants that was beyond merely defensive and, as I mention below in the section on attendance, seemed to be serving as a tool to encourage attendance of the Bible studies themselves.

In conjunction with this, the Head of Laity specifically cited the importance of being able to discernment spiritual matters in the context of the ever-growing religious marketplace. He argues that unless there is a strong scriptural basis among their members, congregations can lose members not to secularism but to other religious bodies that offer emotionally-satisfying, shallow, and simplistic faith alternatives that may appear as a more palatable substitute for actual discipleship of Christ. From this perspective the Bible study acts as inoculation against all manners of spiritual harm (doctrinal error and downright loss to other religions alike).

Aside from the above-mentioned aspect related to the prosperity doctrine, a number of respondents referred to using their scripture knowledge gained during the Bible studies to fend off pressures

from their families who still participated in traditional or syncretistic rituals, especially relating to weddings and funerals where they are deeply ingrained in some sections of Ankole culture. One individual recounted an example where she was able to respectfully decline involvement in an activity suggested by her extended family with scripturally based reasoning rather than as a mere assertion of personal preference; the Bible studies had equipped her with the necessary knowledge to engage in such difficult situations. This demonstrates that the role of biblical literacy is not merely about internal defense against unorthodox doctrine, but also external defense against difficult family/cultural dynamics.

To his credit, it should be noted that one thing that no respondent expressed unqualified confidence in was their own personal ability to discern true doctrine, though quite a few in the group claimed to be Bible study attendees. The few who admitted to struggling referred to difficulties in understanding topics such as suffering, predestination, and the relationship between faith and works. I believe this confession, however, adds rather than detracts to the credibility of the data; respondents are clearly not merely “giving their dues” and confessing that they are struggling helps validate the fact that the interview was not guided or that this matter is a genuinely complex one about which they are being honest.

Numerical growth and retention

In addition to the spiritual and devotional impacts of the Bible studies, the interviewed data hinted at the fact that an indirect but crucial relationship between the Bible studies and the numerical growth of the Church exists. Warren claims that genuine spiritual depth within a local Church is the bedrock upon which numerical church growth is built¹⁴. Only if a Church is growing numerically and spiritually, rather than quantitatively alone (which may prove temporary, as stated above, or the result of superficiality), does a church have the foundation to grow numerically by retaining its members, attracting new attendees, producing leaders who plant other Churches and etc.

Several church leaders at St. Peter Kakoba Church noted the present numerical stagnation that could be a result of lack of involvement in the Bible studies. One may even infer that a decrease

¹⁴ Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 131.

in attendance within the studies can correspond to the previous increase in church membership and decreased member leakage, about five to seven years before this study was done, when their studies were apparently more vibrant. As such a revived Bible study program may serve a critically important aspect in terms of Church retention as well as growth.

A number of respondents reported their relocation to St. Peter Kakoba Church from their previous congregations partially due to the reputation of Bible study ministry, even if weakened as discussed previously. One woman, a young professional who was able to relocate to Mbarara because of her work position, explained that as she examined different congregations she was specifically directed to St. Peter Kakoba because, as she said to us, this is a church where people actually study the Bible, not just come for Sunday service. Thus, a modest although definite reputation for solid scriptural study may function as a differentiating aspect in the Church's growth by becoming a reason why individuals decide to join the Church.

On the other hand, a number of the church leaders lamented the loss of several congregations in recent years-particular younger believers concerned with the nature of authentic discipleship-to different churches that were reputed to possess more vibrant, strong Bible study ministries. Though concrete numbers are not yet available for these members leaving, their exodus, corroborated by numerous independent accounts, provides an illustration of the numerically stakes involved in the condition of the Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church and in the Church in general: lack of such a Bible study indicates the potential to lose members not only from a purely spiritual standpoint but a numerical one as well.

Interestingly, the Bible studies leader mentioned that there has been a small although gradual process of visitation from Bible study participants attending worship services on Sunday regularly, if at all infrequently before their attendance at Bible study. This pattern implies that the Bible studies serve as a weak point of entry for new or potential members of the Church who might initially find Sunday worship more daunting than casual Bible study attendance. Therefore, strengthen of Bible study ministry will contribute to numerical gains not just from retainment, but this relatively more quiet avenue of growth as well.

I should note that a few respondents drew a line directly between Bible study attendance and participation in sacraments of baptism and confirmation. The Parish Priest observed that confirmands who attended the Bible studies possessed a “much better understanding” of doctrinal topics than those who chose not to. This suggests another channel (or avenue) that the Bible study serves to strengthen: new or continuing believers learn enough about basic Christian doctrine to have more than sufficient understanding for their confirmed affirmation of the faith during confirmation instructions.

It was also mentioned by more than a few church leaders that, of those who attend the Bible study group, there is a disproportionate number of those taking up other aspects of lay leadership within the parish (that is becoming churchwardens, Sunday School leaders, choir committee members). The Parish Priest felt this could not be attributed solely to chance. Participation within the programme seems to result in the necessary confidence and ownership necessary to take responsibility within the church on a broader level. The Bible Study programme, then, also functions as a less formal leadership pipeline within the church community.

A final connection drawn between the church vitality and the Bible study programme was that of giving and stewardship. Long-term participants of the Bible study program confessed to having grown a sense of ownership of the church's mission, an aspect they more than few explicitly attributed to giving more consistently-whether regular tithing or project specific giving. Though there was no intention of collecting financial data for this study, the consistent linking between these two factors (Bible study participation and financial giving) suggested an interesting avenue for future research study of economics and church life.

It is worth noting, finally, that it was not true of all participants that every possible benefit was gained each time they attended the Bible Study. Several respondents talked about phases of spiritual dryness/inconsistent participation, even while maintaining their nominal membership of the group. This is not to dismiss the findings but to underscore the importance of a nuanced understanding of them: The Bible study programme helps create conditions for spiritual growth (and the subsequent outcomes- relational, doctrinal, and numerical growth) to occur, but it does not guarantee it directly. This is why skilled leadership, as discussed in the next chapter, is important.

Summary

The finding of this chapter that Bible studies can significantly contribute to the spiritual, relational, doctrinal, and numerical growth of the church community cannot be denied. Each participant experienced these benefits to a different degree and at various points along their journey of discipleship. Unfortunately, it seems that only a relatively small segment of the congregation is currently experiencing such a profound degree of growth. Addressing the factors that prevent widespread participation, discussed in the next chapter, is crucial in ensuring that the benefits of the Bible study programme may be accessed by all.

All of these findings suggest that the relationship between the church and the Bible study programme is best expressed as a complex web of various interactions, rather than a simple cause-and-effect relationship; spiritual growth, along with relational, doctrinal, and numerical growth are interconnected and mutually reinforcing as Christians mature within the church community. It seems urgent that the vast majority of members of St. Peter Kakoba should have access to such a potent catalyst for transformation as is present in its currently small but thriving Bible study group; addressing the issue of participation will be critical in enabling widespread congregational vitality.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CHURCH IN RUNNING BIBLE STUDIES AND STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This chapter presents data and analysis on the challenges faced by St. Peter Kakoba Church in running its Bible study programme, as well as the strategies proposed by church leaders and congregants to improve participation and effectiveness. These findings respond to the third research objective. The chapter organises the data around key thematic clusters: logistical and scheduling challenges, content and facilitation challenges, attitudinal and motivational barriers, and structural and leadership challenges. It then presents the strategies recommended by participants to address each of these areas.

Thematic clusters discussed below represent inductively generated themes which recurred in interviews and questionnaires, rather than an a priori selection of potential Barriers. The issue that recurred in answers to a significant extent across the groups of respondents – church leaders, regular congregational participants and non-attenders - has been highlighted as robust and discussed at length in this chapter. The recurrence of less of a particular kind of comment, such as, in the case of a single respondent, have been noted less forcefully as illustrative.

Logistical and Scheduling challenges.

The most consistently mentioned barriers to attending the Bible study were in the study were, as is indicated in Chapter Two on Bible study methodology: the timings and, place where the Bible study is provided. Mbarara's social life (and this, obviously, for, non-bible study groups as well) makes it difficult to provide, an evening at bible time, when many workers are busy with their work during working days.

A business woman who does not regularly attend shared:

"I close my shop at seven o'clock in the evening. By the time I get home, cook for my children, and settle them, the Bible study is either almost over or I am simply too tired to come. I would love to attend, but Wednesday evening does not work for me. Has anyone asked us what time works?"

A couple of men on Bible study also raised similar work-related constraints as many women had done around household concerns, the report says. Younger age respondents identified study time for courses, as well as evening extra-curricular activities, as clashing with Bible study, it points out. These observations all lead to the conclusion that the scheduling of the bible study has perhaps not been evaluated, updated or modified taking cognizance of the changing times relating to income-generation activities (Socio Economic) .

Concerns around the location for bible study included that the formal, slightly large nature of the main church building was not always conducive to the informal and relational feel needed for such a study, a few indicated a preference for at-home Bible studies or for home group Bible studies.

Another area that could use consideration is seasonal time conflicts - quite a number expressed concern that attendance dipped even more during the main planting and harvesting seasons of the year when many participants are engaged in agricultural activities far into the evening. One member admitted that he sometimes think of suspending meetings during this period if everyone in on our group is tied to work in the field but he also thinks we want to make our group resilient so we do not easily stop for a small thing. The scheduling of this bible study needs flexibility to accommodate weekly rhythms, as well as the broad seasonal agricultural cycle that shapes life in the local community.

Another issue, especially relevant for the many female participants, is childcare - “A few female participants noted that without access to babysitting, the Bible study session often precluded them from participating because their young and often noisy and active children would be an undue disruption during a time of prayer and discussion.” This facility, not easily to implement with simple means like a voluntary rotation roster amongst members, “had apparently never really been considered as an option by those in charge of the bible study activity” according to a number of respondents in the sample, which perhaps reveals a mindset where childcare has not always been framed in the equation as a factor that helps women stay engaged and included, but something to manage outside of church programmes.

Content and facilitation challenges

A second cluster of challenges related to the content and facilitation of the Bible study sessions themselves. Several non-attending respondents described past experiences of attending the programme and finding it unengaging, repetitive, or insufficiently relevant to their daily lives. One respondent noted:

“The first time I went to Bible study, we spent the whole time reading a very long passage and the leader just read it out and then asked a few questions that nobody really answered. I did not feel like I learned anything. I felt like it was a church service but smaller. I did not go back after that.”

This feedback highlights a critical facilitation challenge: the difference between reading scripture and studying scripture. Effective Bible study requires skilled facilitation that draws participants into active engagement with the text, connects the passage to concrete life situations, and creates space for authentic questions and honest discussion. As Ogden argues, genuine disciple-making happens not in passive instruction but in interactive engagement with the Word within a relational community.¹⁵

The Bible study leader himself acknowledged the limitation of his current approach:

“I was not trained as a teacher. I read the passage, I say what I think it means, and I ask a few questions. Sometimes people contribute, sometimes they do not. I know my approach is not the best but I do not know how else to do it. I need training in how to lead a Bible study in a way that makes people want to come back.”

The absence of a structured curriculum further compounds the facilitation challenge. Without a clear pedagogical progression, the Bible study risks becoming a series of disconnected sessions that fail to build cumulative biblical understanding. Church leaders acknowledged that the development or adoption of an appropriate curriculum should be a priority.

¹⁵Ogden, Greg. *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 55.

Several respondents also lamented the passaging process where the programme's Bible study jumps from one book to the next, a completely different thing, from week to week without even indicating beforehand why the teaching is like that. As a result it is hard to know what will be discussed on the next day and be prepared even as someone is active Bible Study attendee. Even simply indicating, once per term, what is being taught may perhaps allow congregates with keen interest on such a topic to turn up," one attendee noted.

The lack of any formal process to elicit feedback further exasperates the facilitation issues. None of the respondents (neither regular attenders nor occasional ones) reported being asked at some point by church leadership or any relevant persons what his or her take on the content, process or utility of the bible study had been. Thus whatever adaptation had ever been introduced on the teaching methodology had apparently been born out of his intuition rather than systematic assessment of how his sessions are being received, another missed opportunity for systematic incremental improvement of programme.

The absence of readily available training materials in the Runyankole language further accentuate the previously alluded training gap. As the study learned there are few English facilitators handbooks available though (these predominantly developed by international parachurch organizations), the study Bible leader noted that they had difficulty identifying local equivalent that could be used or even adaptable for St. Peter Kakoba. Many respondents advised the church/the diocese could provide or develop basic facilitators manuals in the local language to make available the relevant support required to equip their lay facilitators in using such methodology more holistically.

Attitudinal and motivational factors

Another class of obstacles are not related with curriculum delivery but human attitude and motivation towards such a program. Numerous respondents were of the impression that bible study is mainly for the very religious ones, the elders, women, leaders, among others which implicitly constitutes a form of societal norm by which the church congregates many Christians away from Bible study participation.

One young adult male respondent articulated this attitude clearly:

“Bible study is for the very serious Christians - the ones who want to become pastors or deacons. For someone like me who is just a regular member, I feel like it is not really for me. I come to church on Sunday and I feel that is enough.”

Such beliefs suggest either a deeper level of theological misunderstanding of the Bible’s value and function or that the church’s vision of producing a scripturally literate congregation has not yet been sufficiently or convincingly communicated to all. The idea that attending Sunday services is the key spiritual engagement in Christian formation presents a challenge to biblical exegesis and Christian pastoral care that leaderships must confront with systematic preaching on scripture literacy.

Gendered attitudinal barriers whereby the problem of negative attitudes towards Bible study also proved to be multifaceted. Several men seemed to implicitly acknowledge or directly state that in this particular congregation, Bible study is a culturally gendered activity on the grounds of the dominant composition of participants, a fact that apparently discouraged their participation even in absence of principled rejection of Bible study in and of itself.

As he eloquently put it, *“would feel out of place...walking into an empty room but with a room where...you are the first, and as far as you knew probably the only man”*. This response clearly illustrates how the present composition could reinforce such attitudinal assumptions in and of itself, irrespective of what the content of Bible study is, the time in which it runs etc. Negative experiences of Bible study or related settings Some of the perceived negative attitudes toward Bible study were grounded in participants’ negative experiential background of participation in Bible study or similar religiously-themed teaching settings in the past (either at St. Peter Kakoba or in earlier Christian experiences).

Several participants expressed that discomfort associated with being asked to read scripture aloud or respond to questions in public is often caused by those who do not like being noticed or identified particularly by reading or questions. These participants, some from less privileged or formal backgrounds reported feeling a sense of self-consciousness when asked to read because of their perceived lower literacy and less familiar vocabulary for the subjects at stake in Bible studies. According to some responses, Bible studies would ‘be useful for me...if only the reader of the

Bible and those who read verses (or answer questions) are of great patient and non-judgmental approach.

Structural and leadership challenges

The data also revealed structural and leadership challenges that limit the effectiveness of the Bible study programme. The programme operates largely on the personal initiative of the Bible study leader, without robust institutional support in terms of resources, training, or accountability structures. The Parish Priest, despite acknowledging the importance of the programme, admitted that it does not receive the same level of strategic planning and pastoral investment as other church activities:

“If I am honest, I have not given the Bible study programme the attention it deserves. Sunday service, pastoral visits, funerals, weddings - these take most of my time. The Bible study continues because of the dedication of the leader, but I have not provided proper oversight or resources. This needs to change.”

The lack of any pastoral championship results in a structural deficiency that, when the Bible study leader is unable to attend, the session must be cancelled. No “team” of co-facilitators exists to maintain consistent delivery and no formal procedure exists for evaluation of the program's efficacy or for responding to attendee feedback. In short, these structural shortcomings seem to demonstrate a tendency on the part of the church to view these midweek program ministries as marginal to, rather than fundamental for, the church's overall pastoral mission.

One more structural deficit was also discussed, concerning the lack of succession planning, while saying that should the current leader of bible study become ill, move out of the area, or have finished the course of his service, no successor has been identified to lead the group; church leaders themselves have not kept notes regarding teaching methods, lesson content, and what lessons they learned over his four years of leadership. Such structural institutional memory loss may result in rebuilding the program virtually from the ground up after any potential transition. The priest explained that financial shortages at the parish level, although indirect, do have some impact as well. The only funding available comes from limited discretionary funds available when core operating needs are met.

These resources for midweek Ministries such as the bible study often become secondary; consequently, no funding may be made available to support the program with needed materials or an adequate public address system (for larger groups) or with even very modest financial resources for transport of bible study leaders to a weekly study in an urban zone.

Thus, a significant component of the issues facing bible study is really one that affects many mid-week parish ministries more generally due to the lack of sufficient parish funds to support their continuation. Lastly, while many respondents identified discipleship and the reading and study of scripture as top priorities in parish planning documents, few interviewees were able to connect how these aspirations translate to the day-to-day work of the ministry. There were few or no specific, Measurable goals or milestones listed in these planning documents associated with improving St Peter's bible study ministry, so says head layman that the practice is an endemic one not just at St's but generally throughout parish governance.

4.5 Proposed strategies for improvement

In their discussions, attendees at St. Peter's, both the pastors/ leaders and the individual congregants/ members at large proposed various strategies and approaches to revitalization of this bible study programme:

One key recommendation the vast majority of participants advocated, is the reallocation of day of bible study program time and space. Many participants expressed the wish that the bible study time be shifted to a day more convenient than week days, to avoid fatigue or family constraints. Most people I talked with suggested a move to a Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon that would accommodate many if not all.

Several suggestions including my own called for the use of zone-based home bible studies to reach members who would not ordinarily travel to the central church facility on any given week evening and to offer the possibility for more relaxed discussion and interaction than may be possible in a large congregational setting. A few members and a pastor favored the hybrid approach involving monthly congregational gatherings in conjunction with weekly smaller home and/or church groups as a means of establishing broader congregational unity and individual convenience. Both the Pastor as well as numerous members strongly articulated a need for the use of curriculum at St.

Peter's Kakoba Church. Curriculum should have clearly defined theological objectives; be relevant to the present-day existence of members; and be appropriately presented to reflect the needs and capacities of attendees at various levels of education. Several indicated awareness of and willingness to adopt bible study curriculum from other denominational groupings for possible use.

In addition, pastors and parishioners recommended developing the capacity of the Bible study Leader and eventually a team of several co-facilitators, in new ways of Bible study methods such as participatory, interactive discussion style based on scripture. As says Bratcher¹⁶, such change of paradigm will eventually translate into a more vital, transformative, church centered life on the part of a greater portion of the church community and it has been noted in many studies that a good teacher can also teach well for an individual Bible study meeting of some-30 participants if the pastor is able to train and mentor a Bible Study Leader and/or leader. Inculcating of a strong culture of Bible Study in the congregational Life One more significant proposal on the list is that the culture needs to be shifted towards Bible study being viewed as the norm, rather than an anomaly, in the normal spiritual journey of a Christian disciple. Pastor and members insisted upon pulpit presentation as it often helps to keep the issue in mind of the majority.

The goal is for bible study to be seen as a foundational element of Christian Discipleship in the same way Willard's exhortation regarding spiritual disciplines are important for the purpose of spiritual formation¹⁷. It helps individual members see Bible study not as something one may chooses to participate in but as an essential element in the discipline of growing in the spiritual life of individual members as Christian disciples.

Making Bible study visible as well as the the use of testimony to spread the Word of God. As suggested by numerous Bible study participants, personal anecdotes demonstrating transformation, conflicts resolution, personal breakthroughs, as well as other relevant positive outcomes resulting from participation in Bible studies could have a potent personal appeal (the writer's own words). If such testimonials could be incorporated during Sunday service, or at various bible study times, this could indirectly communicate to non-participants what positive

¹⁶ Bratcher, Dennis. The Development of the Bible. www.crivoice.org. Retrieved December 20, 2016.

¹⁷ Willard, Dallas. The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 318.

changes they are missing out on by not actively participating in bible studies, or, even better, how they could engage more fully.

The role of pastoral leadership is one of the strongest recommendations by both leaders of the Church and by many of her members. This concern regarding bible studies not being receiving enough support/focus from the parish priests and is widely supported by numerous individuals. “The responsibility is yours as the pastor of this church and you need to invest seriously in spiritual formation rather than delegating it¹⁸. The pastor needs to be visible at bible study activities at least once a month, to endorse this vital program through preaching from pulpit to demonstrate the important role bible study play in our life and he needs to bring about the necessary support team (bible study team/committee to facilitate).

The application of mobile technology. The use of simple mobile technology to improve awareness and to reach remote members would also be an affordable solution. Mobile based information exchange- using a bible Study whatsapp group (by the leader) whereby participants could share the relevant texts for upcoming week ahead, weekly announcements, and relevant thoughts, would go some way to increase participation. Many parishioners own smartphones and have whatsapp subscriptions, making it an inexpensive option to enhance program delivery or perhaps reach even nonparticipants who can access a neighbor with a smart phone. A form of simple tangible recognition It was also proposed to some form of visible recognition of regular attenders and those demonstrating progress on their journey of discipleship. Although not intended to create a competitive spiritual environment, recognizing the commitment and efforts of some individuals may enhance the programme by promoting recognition and elevation of its place within the congregational structure.

Overall, the strategies respondent group propose the scale from low costs, immediately implementable solutions (such as a WhatsApp reminder group and the simple maintenance of attendance register to more substantial, long term structural reforms requiring long-standing commitments of leadership (such as curriculum design, facilitator training and shift towards a small-groups format). The range itself is indicative of two things; there are practical changes that

¹⁸ Hull, Bill. *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 97.

do not necessarily depend on large-scale investment to initiate them in the local context but rather on simple, low-risk pilot projects aimed at stimulating momentum and demonstrating impact, while also building grounds for greater reform later. The leadership in St. Peter Kakoba would do well in sequencing such interventions intentionally to begin with the locally feasible resource and operational considerations, and then push the necessary policy for broader diocesan resources through the appropriate structures for other major reforms.

A number of respondents propose that the church may also want to designate at least one Sunday every other quarter of the year as Bible Study Sunday, where the service structure-starting with sermon and culminating with the intercessory prayers and notices will deliberately focus on the church based mid-week program. In their words: having such calendar tied promotional activities, so that promotion would rely not just on goodwill for individual stakeholders at opportune time, but that it should become regular, sustainable feature that consistently reinforce church awareness to our medium Bible Study programme will significantly ensure sustained attention and consistent promotion.

Finally, respondents suggested that the church consider possible partnerships and cooperation with academic theological institutions in the larger Mbarara City, and also Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology (in Mukono), so as to enlist the support of training ministers and theology students whom at least in part, would have willingness and openness to engage with Bible study programme for purposes of training and teaching for practical internship at parish level as one practical ministry area of service. For some respondent, this form of cooperation would be mutually beneficial because, on the one hand, the church would at virtually no costs be able to access a trained personnel resource base that comes with the right skills in biblical understanding, biblical study content as well as pedagogy on other side, training ministers would attain the opportunity to have direct practical field experience with a congregation in its real and unique contexts; a key element missing due to current gaps that can be addressed at much smaller cost through this synergy without the need for substantial parish financial investment.

At bottom, overall challenges identified in this section coupled by respondents' recommendations show commonality; challenges facing the Bible study in St. Peter Kakoba church are neither unprecedented, neither insurmountable, nor they may disappear with the passive march of time

and continued goodwill of the overburdened leadership, but it would require deliberate coordination activities along four key areas aforementioned-including structural, content-based, logistic, attitudinal in order to effectively take advantage of the significant numerical and spiritual impact that were highlighted in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of Bible studies on Church growth in a case study of St. Peter Kakoba Church of Uganda, Ankole Diocese. The research was guided by three specific objectives: to assess the current state of the Bible studies at St. Peter Kakoba Church; to assess the contribution of Bible studies to the growth of Christians at St. Peter Kakoba Church; and to identify the challenges the Church is experiencing in running its Bible studies and the ways to improve their quality of participation. The research adopted a qualitative research design approach and used data through in-depth interviews and questionnaire schedules.

The appraisal of the state of Bible study program at St Peter Kakoba Church showed a program which is structurally present but operationally failing. The midweek Bible study is official recognised and pastorally authorised, but attendance figures are alarming low, narrow and declining. The program has no framework or curriculum, the facilitation methods are poor, and the meeting time and structure inappropriate for the relations focused study that a Bible study requires. Such is the first layer of challenge facing the Church in relation to its Bible study program.

The evaluation of Bible study on Christian growth indicated that it contributes tremendously and very broadly where it exists. Regular attendance of Bible study involves development inscriptural understanding, personal moral transformation, Christian relationships, deeper doctrinal understandings, and some indirect impact on Church's numeric retention. The contributions shown by the data are very consistent with McGrath's assertion of Bible as the life of the church and Sterrett's conviction that Christians remain in the word grow into perfection.

The review of Bible study challenges and solutions showed that the challenges are complex and varied. Logistic issues, the timing and location in particular make them inaccessible for working adults, women under domestic responsibility, and youth. Content and facilitation issues cause the program to be less interesting and relevant. Attitudinally, Christian understand the Bible study as optional or to be pursued by a small elite and structurally, lack of strong pastoral leadership and investment also creates weakness.

The findings from this study thus conclude that the problem of declining Bible study programs at St Peter Kakoba Church is a pastoral issue and not simply organizational or logistic failure. The Church has not yet succeeded to create a culture where daily focused immersion of the word is understood as natural, normal and expected. The absence of a proper congregational culture will continue to limit spiritual depth of the church no matter the Sunday worship quality or evangelical success.

It can therefore be asserted that, Bible studies are not supplementary to a believer's life in the church but a pastoral necessity. A church is not growing in number but not in the depth of scriptures may be resting upon an unstable foundation. However, Christian matured in the word of God as found in the scripture will lead to a church that grows in depth, spiritual maturity and doctrine soundness, Christian relatedness and mission effectiveness.

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

It was therefore recommended that the church leadership should consult and determine through some formal consultative process of the congregation on what would be the ideal day and time. The church could probably benefit by offering more than one bible study group, possibly through having a Saturday-morning bible study program, Sunday-evening study groups and also decentralized home-based bible studies held in different zones in the parish. These alternative scheduling and formats would lower the logistical barriers and demonstrate the churches' earnestness in availing bible study to everyone.

From my study, it is recommended that the Parish Priest and other church leaders of St. Peter Kakoba Church take practical measures and build a congregation wherein interacting with the scripture is deemed a norm, a common and indispensable phenomenon for each and every congregational member rather than something exclusively meant for advanced in maturity. This includes among others, promoting bible study regularly and with fervour from the pulpit, incorporation of testimonials about transformation following bible study in Sunday services and the teaching that Christian discipleship involves mid-week spiritual discipline involving engagement with scripture, to the effect that every single Christian disciple takes responsibility for spiritual discipline involving the in-depth personal study of God's word. In order to achieve this, the Parish Priest ought to commit himself to one bible study in a month at least and also form a

bible study oversight committee to ensure both programmatic quality assurance and Accountability on implementation.

The Church should ideally develop some sort of cell or zonal or group system that could serve as the organizational back-bone of its bible study program. Most studies in the field show that Bible study in smaller group setting with established trust among members, shared responsibility for study and accountable Bible reading leads more profoundly into spiritual formation and Church growth than does large Bible study groups. Eventually, St Peter Kakoba could make a gradual move towards building some kind of cell-type or zonal grouping format, where each church member belongs to a very small group that would engage in weekly bible study meeting in somebody's home or in some church-related public facility. This would not replace central bible study but serve to increase access to personal Bible study regardless of one's timetable, travel ability or education level.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide for Church Leaders

(Parish Priest, Lay Reader, Head of Laity, and Bible Study Leader)

1. Do you have a Bible study programme in your Church?
2. What is the purpose for organising the programme?
3. What day and time is the programme scheduled? Give reasons.
4. Are the members aware of the programme, and how is it promoted?
5. Who leads the programme? What are the criteria for choosing the leaders?
6. What is the curriculum for the programme?
7. How do you assess the attendance: is it declining or increasing? Give reasons.
8. Does the Bible study programme have any effects on overall Church attendance? Explain.
9. What effects does it have on the spiritual growth of the Church?
10. Does it have any bearing on the numerical growth of the Church?
11. In your view, what is preventing many people from attending the programme?
12. What strategies would you recommend to improve the performance and attendance of the Bible study?

Appendix II: Questionnaire for the Christians of St. Peter Kakoba COU

Dear Respondent, this questionnaire is part of a research study on the role of Bible studies on Church growth. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. Thank you for your time.

Section A: Background Information

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. How long have you been a member of this Church?

Section B: Awareness and Participation

4. Are you aware of the Bible study programme run by the Church? Yes [] No []
5. How did you get to know about it? Announcement [] Notice board [] Personal invitation [] No idea []
6. Do you attend the Bible study programme? Regularly [] Once in a while [] Not at all []
7. If not regularly, what prevents you from attending?

.....

Section C: Impact and Relevance

8. Do you study the Bible on your own, apart from church programmes? Yes [] No []
9. Has Bible study participation (either at church or personally) had any impact on your spiritual life? Yes [] No []
10. If yes, please describe the impact:

.....

Section D: Suggestions

11. What would make you more likely to attend the Bible study programme?

.....

12. What do you think can be done to improve the running of the programme?

.....

Thank you very much for your responses.

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