

**EXAMINING THE RELEVANCE OF CELL GROUP MINISTRY IN CHURCH GROWTH: A
CASE OF ST.PETER'S CATHEDRAL - TORORO (BUKEDI DIOCESE)**

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Declaration

I Barasa Patrick Nicholas hereby declare that this is my original work, is not plagiarized and has not been submitted to any other institution for any award.

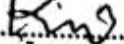
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Approval

This is to certify that this research titled, "Examining the relevance of Cell Group Ministry in Church growth: A case of St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese)" has been done under my supervision and is now ready for submission.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to three persons, firstly, to my wife and dear friend, Eng. Hellen N. Barasa, a true partner that has sacrificed for me to pursue this divine calling.

Secondly, to my parents, Rt. Rev. Samuel G. B. and Mama Elizabeth Egesa, for inspiring and supporting me to walk this journey that will most likely lead me into full time ordained ministry.

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Abstract

The research examined the relevance of cell-group Ministry and how this has affected church growth in St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese). Informed by this background, the study identified the factors causing the decline in cell group ministry in the church, established attempts by the church to address this decline and established the effects that Cell Group ministry has on the church.

A qualitative evaluative research design was adopted for this research. This was helpful in objectively understanding the perceptions about cell group ministry. The study population included respondents selected among the clergy, cell group leaders, laity and cell group members. Throughout the research, in-depth interviews and examination of records were used to collect data. Respondents' responses were processed and analysed through the careful coding of interview replies.

The study identified several factors that are causing the decline in cell group ministry in the Church such as Christian failure to balance cell group and work; the limited appreciation of the cell group as the foundational and core unit that links the family to the Church; and cell group leaders that have no training and mentorship on the detail of the ministry. Even then, several attempts have been taken by the church to address the decline, such as, provision of leadership by the present clergy, creating clear feedback channels to the members and the deliberate awareness through regular announcements. Finally, is that, Cell group ministry even in its current state has had positive impact on both the church and the general community as witnessed in church unity, increase in numbers, conversion of non-believers and growth in the prayer life and bible reading culture of members.

The study recommendations include areas that should be addressed by: Uganda Christian University as a minister training institution; St. Peter's Cathedral as a beneficiary of Cell Group Ministry; and Bukedi diocese as a mother body.

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Definition of key terms

Local church. According to Afolaranmi (2022) local church means a church that is “self-governing and self-propagating and self-supporting”. For purposes of this study, the local church means believers found in the parishes that make up St. Peter’s Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese).

Church member: A baptized Christian who belongs to the local Church and whose names are recorded in the church membership book (Roberta, 2010).

Cell groups. Cell groups are open, evangelism focused groups, entwined into the church’s life (Comiskey, 2023). Roberta (2010) adds that “A Christian small group is an international, face to face gathering of 3 to 12 people on regular time schedule with a common purpose of discovering and growing in the possibilities of the abundant life in Christ”.

Evangelism: “To evangelise is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in the God through him as their savior, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his Church” (Green, 2023). The researcher used this definition and this guided the important conversations during the study.

Acronyms

4 Ws: Welcome, Worship, Word and Works

CGC: Cell Group Church

CGE Cell Group ministry

COU: Church of Uganda

MDIV: Master of Divinity

UCU: Uganda Christian University

USA: United States of America

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.0 Introduction

This research examined the relevance of Cell Group ministry and the effects it has had in the church at St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese). The researcher paid attention to how the Cell Group ministry resonates with the great commission that our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted with the church. Information on cell group activities since 2018 were studied and comparisons made to measure the effectiveness of this kind of evangelism in the church of Christ.

This research therefore, identified the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the church, established attempts by the church to address this decline and examined the effects of Cell Group ministry in the church.

Chapter one focused on the background information regarding the topic selection and interest. It looked at the statement of the problem, the scope and value of the research and the conceptual framework that was used in the research.

1.1 Background to the study

As recorded in Acts 2:42, 46-47, the cell group ministry was instrumental in the early church as it created spiritual warmth and a sense of care for one another. Many Christian authors such as Gareth, 2011; Jeffrey, 2022; Mahaney, 2011; and Kajolya, 2009; due to the positive impacts that the cell group ministry plays in church growth and discipleship, have produced reasonable literature that authentically extols and informs this kind of ministry. The Navigators and International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, are two other organisations, well known for their books on the cell group ministry.

Cell Group ministry in Uganda became common in the 1940s through the 1970s as a place for discipleship and a vehicle for outreach to the surrounding communities.

Elsewhere, the cell group or small group ministry has over the years been appreciated by Christian organization or even churches. A good example is Watoto Church in Uganda that has enthusiastically coped with the idea, while many more are looking towards the same as a definite strategy for reach out and evangelism.

Kajolya (2009), advises that understanding the historical and cultural background of the local church provides deeper insight into effects of the Cell Group ministry narrative.

In St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo, the current Cell Group ministry/ministry is an 8-year-old ministry. The Cathedral church records starting with 2018 indicate, when this evangelistic ministry was re-introduced in 2017, about 45 percent of the members embraced the ministry. The cell groups had the members attend these meetings regularly but also used it as a platform to evaluate their weekly outreach efforts.

However, towards the end of 2022, participation of members in cell group meetings started dropping. This scenario came along with a number of problems such as: the faithfulness of members seemed to have declined and many church members were losing their spiritual foundation and having no longer interest in the cell group ministry.

This research therefore, identified the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry, established attempts by the church to address this decline and examined the effects of Cell Group ministry in the church.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Church of Uganda (COU), Cell Group ministry was witnessed mostly in the periods of 1940s to the 1970s, when Christians met in homes for fellowship in what is locally termed '*Kukungaana*' (Bukedi Diocesan report on Mission, 2018). The impact of this kind of evangelism was too strong that many churches, including St. Peter's Cathedral embraced it. However, in the years of 2018 to 2022, involvement of members in cell group meetings within St Peter's Cathedral dropped from 45 to 10 percent (Bukedi Diocesan report on Mission, 2023). This decline affects the spiritual, numerical, social

and moral aspects of the Church. Additionally, St. Peter's Cathedral does not have a definite strategy that can assist in addressing this decline. This study therefore sought to identify the factors causing this decline, established attempts by the church to address it and examined the effects that Cell Group ministry has on the church.

1.3 Purpose and objectives of the study

The central issue for this research was an examination of the relevance of cell Group Ministry and how this has affected church growth in St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese).

1.3.1 Objectives of the study

1. To identify the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the church.
2. To establish attempts by some churches to address this decline.
3. To examine the effects that Cell Group ministry has had on the church.

1.4 Research questions

1. What factors are causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the church?
2. How have the churches tried to address the decline in Cell Group ministry?
3. What effects has Cell Group ministry had on the church?

1.5 Scope of the study

1.5.1 Geographical Scope

St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo is the diocesan seat of Bukedi diocese (Church of Uganda). Based in the heart of Tororo, the Cathedral is next to the headquarters of Tororo district local government. The Cathedral has two parishes, that is, St. John the Evangelist and St. James Morukatipe. Each of the parishes has two daughter churches. The cathedral also has two other daughter Churches that is, St. Andrew's Amagoro COU and Nyangole COU.

1.5.2 Time Scope

The study considered a period of five years (2018 to 2022), when the Cell Group ministry has been witnessed in St. Peter's Cathedral - Tororo.

1.5.3 Content scope

The research focused on the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry, established attempts by some churches to address this decline and examined the effects of Cell Group ministry.

1.6 Justification of the study

Studies on an existing ministry tantamount to policy analysis and can affect ministry positively (Anderson, 2018). Premised on this background, the study was deemed resourceful in studying the relevance of Cell Group ministry in Bukedi diocese. Cell group ministry was studied as a practical phenomenon that should be addressed by St. Peter's Cathedral deanery. There is need for accurate and reliable information regarding the effects of Cell Group ministry.

1.7 Significance of the study

This research will contribute to literature by providing evidence-based information that will encourage members of the church in St. Peter's Cathedral and indeed the wider church, to create spiritual warmth within their cell groups. This kind of warmth will, more likely convince other people to join the cell groups and then the big church. The study will also assist the church in building a team of church ministers around their unique gifts and responsibilities. Thirdly, church leaders will benefit by using small groups as a model to promote evangelism. This, will be instrumental in promoting both unity and growth in the church.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Throughout this literature review, contextual and geographical gaps were identified that helped the researcher in analyzing of the research findings in Chapter four and making realistic recommendations in Chapter six. This chapter therefore presents a review of the relevant literature associated with the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the church, attempts by some churches to address this decline and the effects that Cell Group ministry has had on the church.

2.1: Factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the Church

Some researchers have stated that there are different factors as to why Cell Group ministry should increase, and that when membership decreases, the number of the general church attendance can be expected to decrease (Chung, 2014). Although the above scholars' claims have some truth, they cannot be used as a limit to define the loss of the people in cell groups in the church globally. The decline of the membership in cell groups is rather a sign of the real problem that could be taking place amongst the cell group members. More research is needed to determine the cause of the loss of members in cell group and the eventual decline in this kind of ministry. The clear definition of the decline of the cell group members at hand should focus on the relationship between good members and the amount that comes with growth of the same members (Matthew 28:19-20), a key reality that this research sought to address.

The body of Christ as seen in the cell groups must be united. It ought to be characterized by brotherly love, unity, and diversity among its members, as mentioned in the apostolic church (Acts 2:42, 44). The four characteristics of the apostolic church should ideally enable it to grow in both quantitative and qualitative dimensions: through fellowship, obedience to the preaching of the apostles, breaking of bread, and prayer to God. These activities in the church should produce good believers who can preach the gospel of Christ to change their congregations. Such cell group membership must lead to growth. Therefore, the absence of these leads to decline in the Cell Group

ministry. It is imperative to note that both unity and diversity are important if cell groups are to function effectively. When some or all of the characteristics of the biblical church explained above are lost, decline in cell groups is inevitable.

The lack of efficient leadership. Sometimes a group of spiritually charged people lose members for other reasons, such as moving to another location. In this case, there can be no decrease in the cell population because the few remaining members if with good leadership can be well-grounded can continue and grow the cell group. When members lose good things or both bad and good things, a decline in real sense occurs. This is because a small group with spiritually immature leaders who do not meet biblical standards is not good for God's purpose (Romans 12:2a; 1 Peter 1:14; 4:2). Members, whose leaders who do not follow the rules outlined in the above paragraph can be considered spiritually lost. As a result, existing members leave the group (Stoll and Petersen 2008). The argument here is that the leaders of the group are unable to fulfill their mandate, and the result is a decline and eventual failure of the cell group.

Cell Group ministry declines when the holiness, love and unity of the members are not good and eventually disappears (Costas, 2013). In other words, a group of hands that have suffered spiritual destruction cannot participate in the mission of Jesus Christ whether as missionaries of the cell group or even representatives of a bigger healthy church. Therefore, there is no growth in such a cell group in such a community and the evangelism efforts yields little or no impact, causing the decline. Furthermore, these cell groups become dysfunctional as they cannot lead others to Christ and cannot maintain their own membership (Jenson, 2018). These groups have nothing to do with the community welfare or the welfare of the members themselves, who eventually or abandon the cell group at some stage. Membership further continues to decline because new people are not brought in to replace those who leave the current cell groups (Stoll and Peterson, 2018). The spiritual loss of group members does affect mature Christians and those who do not conform to the standards of this world. Mature Christians leave the cell groups because they do not see themselves as part of a negative non growing cell culture, while other group members leave because they have lost their love for Christ.

The other and common complaints why Cell Group ministry is on the decline is the feeling of tiredness, exhaustion or even depression (Comiskey, 2017). This usually happens when only few members of the cell group attend the weekly prayer or fellowship sessions. Many fellowships, training sessions, and meetings in the cell groups often require team members to spend more time together as an exhibition of these commitments. Although not recommended for "planning," the Cell group's calendar can become overflowing with planning activities. Laurenti Magesa's observation that "non-Jewish converts constituting the "Gentile" members of the Church experienced firsthand what it means to be wounded in the name of Christ at the coming of Christianity" seems to be fading away (Magesa, 2021). For time-strapped city dwellers, the life-or-death urgency of a packed calendar can be more stressful than supportive. Encouraging and motivating cell group members should be every leader's task while encouraging them not to demoralize the rest of the cell group members. Without well-designed, well-explained, and user-friendly cell group initiatives and programs, long-term goals of reaching out and evangelism may not be achieved. A solid theological foundation that provides the intrinsic motivation needed to sustain the mission of cell groups needs to be adopted. Without it, the church's processes seem to be based on motivation and control. Observers such as Comiskey (2017) have expressed surprise at the large number of purported cell group leaders yet the impact of their ministry can hardly be measured due to competing demands. The top-down command-and-control structure of small groups can make it difficult to leverage individual strengths. Cell group leaders must always be spearheads for the entire team and often find themselves responsible for the processes of other leaders if the ministry of cell groups will not decline.

A common complaint in Cell Group Evangelism is insufficient Word nourishment. In Cell Groups, the format of cell meetings is standardised into the so called 4 Ws: Welcome, Worship, Word and Works (Coleman and Lim, 2021). It is not uncommon for cell group enthusiasts to speak when referring to their non-negotiable modus operandi. The 4 Ws

format is a star feature in the Cell Group. Typically, the time allowed for Word in a cell meeting is no more than 50 minutes. The Word content is usually based on the previous week's Sunday pulpit sermon. The cramped cell meeting format and the need to overcome the practical difference between preaching and systematic teaching, both place constraints on in-depth teaching of the Word in cells. But due to their entrenched antipathy towards concentrated bible study, leaders regard over-feeding rather than under-feeding as the greater danger.

The failure to manage conflict in the cell groups. The other factors relate to young leaders and the leaders of the children in the cell groups that are primarily the first contacts in cell groups yet with or without conflict management techniques (Hayward, 2005). Conflict in church results in the sinking or shrinking of the cell groups as members would withdraw to a more harmonious group or even retreat to their homes. The leaders of the cell groups must be fully aware that the failure to manage conflict in cell groups has negative consequences and the eventual non-development and lack of cell group growth (Rahim 2002, Tjosvold, 2008). Although not always possible, the cell group leaders must learn the outcomes of conflict to members and strive at hitting compromises or avoiding the conflict in the cell groups.

The lack of care and concern for the needs of others leads to the loss of interest in cell group ministry and eventual decline (Dunaetz, 2019). This calls for intentional collaboration between members of the cell group and taking care of each other's needs. These interests include but are not limited to celebration of church festivities, celebration of life events, standing with one another in times of sorrow for comfort. Studies in churches show that people will reciprocate even if one party to a conflict does not get what they want (for example, the time people spend at one's or even how they react to a dance an event).

2.2 Attempts by some Churches to address this decline

Over the past forty years, there has been a proliferation of cell groups in the Church of Christ. Most of the numerically strong Churches have adopted the cell movement. As of December 2000, the membership of some of the largest Churches in the world had the following breakdown: The Yoida Full Gospel, Korea - a membership of 250, 000, and 25,000 cell groups. Grace and Truth, Korea, with a membership of 105,000, and 1,000 cell groups; The International Charismatic Mission, Columbia, with a membership of 50,000, and over 20,000 cell group; Kum Ran Methodist, Korea, with a membership of 50,000, and 2,700 cell groups; Elim Christian, El Salvador, with a membership of 40,000, and 11,000 cell groups.

The cell groups at International Charismatic Mission penetrate the entire city and ‘like a giant net, eventually gather those attending the cells into the celebration services.’ Thus, the pattern is worship, mission and then celebrating what God had done through their various cell groups is central. In Brazil, there are about 2,000 Brazilian Churches exploding with cell groups. Denominations such as the Assemblies of God are transitioning themselves to the cell ministry. In Cuba, where new Church construction is forbidden, the Assemblies of God have grown from 9,000 to over 100,000 members, and in ten years have more than 2,000 house churches, with the cell being the central feature.

What are some of the commonalities of these growing and dynamic Churches? The following are to be observed. First, prayer is central to their ministry. Many Church members and cells, spend much time in prayer as they agonize over the lost. Like the New Testament Church, they experience ‘signs and wonders.’ Second, they have a clearly defined purpose. They meet to glorify God and program to reach others for the Kingdom of God. Third, leadership is not defined as hierarchical and static. It is dynamic and diffused. As converts are made, the leader encourages them to take on the task of leadership and engage in winning new converts for Christ. Fourth, there is a ‘restorative’ dimension to ministry; that is, they believe that the Church should be restored on the basis of the New Testament Church. Fifth, there is a passion to reform

the Church. Cell groups are of various kinds ranging from Home Groups, Family Ministry Luncheons, Bible Fellowships, Zip Code Cells, Ladies' Cells, Business Cells, Young Singles' Cells, Married Couples Cells, Healing Cells, Nursing Home Cells, Prayer Fellowship Cells, Outreach Youth Cells, et al. What do these cells have in common? They aim at strengthening the individual's faith and encouraging solidarity among the believers as they witness where they serve (Anderson, 2018).

Avoiding superficial treatment in the cell groups. Superficial treatment of the passage is another potential problem that many cell groups face and the churches that have thrived in this ministry have been deliberate to address it. This danger is particularly acute if the group does not realise the importance of serious Bible study, is uncommitted to their task and to one another, or fails to use a commentary or other specialist help (anglicancommunion.org). The problem can also arise if you try to cover too much material in one session. It is usually best to limit the group to a passage with a reasonably self-contained unit of thought. The natural paragraph divisions in the NRSV are generally a useful, quick guide. However, the leader will need to exercise his/her own discretion. Reference to one or two commentaries will also give guidance regarding the optimum number of verses to cover in one session. There is a great deal to be gained in occasionally staying with only one verse to dig deeply into its meaning and explore what it is saying to each person's situation. Snyder's 'Depth and Encounter' method is helpful here.

Not lead to action. Cell group ministry that does not lead to action has received just criticism because it has not always resulted in action (Coleman and Lim, 2021). But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like (Dunaetz, 2019) . But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing. (James 1:22-25 NRSV). In Bible study we should seek to sense, and then

go and do, God's will. It carries with it a commitment to do God's will as he leads. We need the 'freedom to be responsible'. To Forkin (2021), freedom is found in obedience.

The purpose of the Bible is to transform human lives and situations (Paris, 2020). Group members need encouragement to seek the relevance of the Scriptures for specific situations in each of their lives and also for it to become a reality for them (Leid, 2023). When a person says, 'This is what I believe. I must act now in obedience to God's word to me', the group can provide motivational support by praying in the group and covenanting to uphold the person in prayer between group meetings. A pastoral call in person or by telephone, offering help and assuring them of continuing support, can further facilitate their actions. To Kim (2008), accountability is being rediscovered by many as a further motivation for action. Opportunities for reporting progress, or otherwise, can have positive effects provided unreal guilt is not generated due to a legalistic stance by the group. While accountability implies legitimate expectations of those wanting to take their discipleship seriously, it must always be within the context of grace (Chomsky, 2009).

Failure to get an overview. The churches are cautious to the fact that cell groups have not always provided a good model for studying the word or even prayer. Generally Bible study has been too piecemeal. To Anderson (2018), there is a need for a good overview of the Bible, to study it as a complete unit rather than in the fragmented way it has been studied. This is a large undertaking and obviously a verse by verse study cannot be undertaken within the group. The speed with which the study moves will vary from book to book but it is important to avoid getting bogged down or, on the other hand, not capturing the main message of a particular book. Generally the group members contract to read a certain number of chapters, or a whole book, in between meetings. Some will want to do their own reading of commentaries on the weekly segments. Innovative ways have been developed to help people get a broad panorama of the Bible. Some of these are not suitable for use in small groups and are studied individually or in larger gatherings. However, others, such as 'Mastering the Basics' and 'Kerygma', are specifically designed for a small-group setting.

Case of the Cell Group Ministry in St. Thomas Assembly of God, USA (An extract from Wycherley, 2013)

The St. Thomas Assembly of God was founded in February 1971. The goal of the founders was to build a Church based on 'full Gospel standard and doctrine. Most of its membership was drawn from families who migrated to St. Thomas from the Eastern Caribbean. The first worship service was held on March 7, 1971 under the ministry of Pastor Abraham Fenton. After his death, the Rev. Dr. Carlton Williams became the pastor. From 1981-1983, the Church was without a Pastor. In 1983 Pastor George Phillips was appointed Pastor. Under the leadership of the three Pastors and a very capable Board, the Church grew in numbers, and impacted the community with its varied ministries and outreach programs.

The membership has grown to over three hundred members. Some of the ministries in this 'purpose-driven' Church are: Children's Church, Christ ambassadors, (a Youth Ministry), Health Ministry, Helping Hands, Jubilee Bible Club, Jubilee Praise Dancers, Prison Ministry, Queen Louise Ministry, Missionettes, Royal Rangers, and Puppet Ministry. Missionary outreach has taken teams to regional countries, parts of Africa and Asia.

Whereas the case above was successful regarding Cell Group Ministry in St. Thomas Assembly of God (USA), it presents a geographical gap. The researcher sought to explore if such was the case with St. Peter's Cathedral - Tororo.

2.3. Effects that Cell Group ministry causes the church.

Positive effects

The Cell Group ministry concept sees the church as a great reservoir of untapped strength. In particular, it wants to mobilise the laity to impact the world. It sees the layman as a potential minister, thus freeing the church from over-dependence on and over-taxing the scarce pool of clergy. It sees every member in Christ's Body as significant. It is an inclusive and a can-do concept.

The church according to Chomsky (2009) benefits greatly from small meetings like Cell Group Ministry in pastoral care, deeper fellowship and discussion as well as from larger meeting. Talking about lessons from church growth in Indonesia, Chomsky (2009) observed that the Indonesian churches had quite large church services on Sunday but mid-week bible teachings were traditionally conducted through small house groups. The pattern for these small meetings was to move to a different home cell each week, thus allowing a wide range of people to invite their neighbors. Because of these house meetings and the close links between Christians, it was possible for the church elders to know exactly who was present or absent at Sunday services. This contributed to both numerical and spiritual growth. The Indonesian success presented a geographical gap that the researcher sought to study and relate with the Ugandan reality on the cell group ministry.

According to Chomsky's article, (2011) on home cells and church growth, other than Cho's church, there were nine other churches in Korea with more than 30,000 members. All of them had experienced rapid growth by structuring their churches around the cell group ministry. In his research entitled Cell Based Ministry in Latin America, (1997) Chomsky quoted a pastor known as Dion Robert who started a Baptist church in Ivory Coast in 1975. By 1983, it had grown to 683 members. He decided to restructure his church around cell groups. In eight years, the church grew to 23,000 members. This shows how cell groups can contribute to church growth. To Markins (2020), the deliberate focus or ultimate purpose for every function or cell group gathering is ultimately to win souls through conversions. Whereas this seemed successful with the Baptist Church in Ivory Coast, the researcher was interested in examining whether the same would be successful when the Church of Uganda with its structure and policies would be as the one in Ivory Coast.

Writing about churches in Latin America, Dee (2009), gave highlights of a church known as Ehim in El-Salvador which had a membership of 120,000 mainly because of its cell based structure. This was reiterated by Kim (2008), in his work entitled "The role of

preaching in church growth” presented at Liberty Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia. He gave an example of evangelism as a core function of cell groups which translates to church growth when done effectively. He stated that the functions that cell group ministry was due to evangelism ministry towards unbelievers, fellowship of love between believers and caring for each other within the cell groups.

Besides evangelism, cell group ministry focuses on the fellowship characterized by love between believers (Koinonia). They consider the fellowship of love as an important function in that Koinonia; meant the stage as a spiritual community where the existence and presence of Jesus Christ are experienced. Within the small group, members achieve spiritual growth by experiencing the very presence of Jesus Christ which appeared through their true family community. Cell Group ministry thus sees the church as capable of cohesive and meaningful community life. It encourages ordinary members to take the initiative to connect with and care for one another. It stresses that being community imbued with spiritual vitality and fruitfulness is the true form of the church.

Cell Group ministry rewards the otherwise passive and stagnant believer in the pew with a sense of participation and purpose. It emphasizes that church life is not just up-front show, but real-life, widespread witness, down to the grass-root level. It caters well for those who have the need for highly organised activity and the hand of strong leadership over them.

Cell Group ministry places value on being repeatable, focused and result-conscious. It rightly disdains aimless, fruitless, going-through-the-motions normalcy. It rightly decries the maintenance-mode, building bound, outreach-ineffective way of being church. It rightly rejects putting too much self-serving, academic interest into studying the Bible, rather than using the Bible as God’s instrument for transformation and ministry.

The realities of globalisation and the re-assertiveness of leading world religions press Christianity to compete in the market-place. Global outreach does call for a range of

methods that include modular and repeatable mobilisation methods. Whatever its short-comings, the cell group ministry concept must be given due credit as a serious-minded effort to help the church to be globally effective. Where there is care to take stock in what one does and the boldness to switch tracks rather than be format-bound, such openness and integrity must be heartily congratulated. Whereas this is true, it seems to focus at the global church and ignores the local church, a gap that this research sought to address.

Negative effects

The Cell Group ministry model points to a rather stringent and regimented way of organising the church. While it is entirely biblical to stress the urgency of the harvest, and the need for believers to be fruitful, it is quite a different thing to over-step into tight mechanistic formulae for growing the church and reaching the lost. Human needs and life situations are multi-faceted. They do not readily lend themselves to wholesale mechanistic replication and regimentation. The church is a spiritual organism of human lives and not a machine. Repeatable growth procedures always have their right of place in church life. So do strategic patterns for the global mobilisation of the church. But towards people, room for flexibility and diversity is important. Depth and substance are even more critical. The effect above seems to focus to the church in general. This research sought to understand whether such rhetoric applies to the Anglican Church too.

The relentless focus on quick numerical results can compromise the quality of spiritual formation and deeper understanding of Christian values and virtues. Spiritual fruit does not ripen at rigid, arbitrarily pre-determined regularity. It takes time, patience, in-depth teaching, reflection and the ordering of the Holy Spirit to achieve spiritual maturity. Relentless pressure for quantitative growth can degenerate into a meaningless numbers game. For example, in January 2000, the cells in one CGE were told, “without ifs or buts”, to start 5 new cells before that year was over. Many were at a loss at such frenetic haste. Despite constant drive and structures by the church leadership emphasizing mandatory cell membership, very rarely does the cell group

come close to 80% participation and attendance. The research sought to examine whether this reality was the same amongst the cell groups in St. Peter's Cathedral-Tororo.

Another common complaint in Cell Group ministry is a feeling of tiredness and being over-stretched. Every cell member is expected to be involved in cell activity at least two nights a week. Numerous special church-wide projects, training seminars, conventions, frequently require cell members to take more nights out on top of these. Notwithstanding the disdain for "programs", a cell group calendar may be very crowded with programmed activities. For time-poor urban people like Singaporeans, the cell group system with its crowded calendar and "do-or-die" pushiness, may cause burn outs more than it is able to succor. It is one thing to charge up and mobilise lay people, but it is quite another to overtax them, and downplay the demands they face at work, in their own families, their need for further education, and the special needs they may have in certain phases in life. The Singapore experience presented a geographical gap that this researcher sought to examine and whether such an experience was shared in the context of the church at St. Peter's Cathedral.

Many cell group equipping programs tend to over-rely on set manuals and treat such set manuals as largely self-sufficient. One cannot argue against well-written, concise and user-friendly teaching tools. While these are indeed invaluable, equipping cycles could do more with direct exposition of the Bible. A long-term strategic vehicle to meaningfully engage with the demands of the Great Commission cannot afford to be shallow in theological content, and big on "technologies". Sound theological grounding supplies the sturdy inner drive that sustains ministry. Lacking that, a system may find itself relying on strong external motivations and managerial controls.

Observers like Comiskey (2023), have been taken aback by the heavy presence of salaried supervisory staff in some small groups. Being a top-down, command-mode operation, the cell group system may find it harder to generate the self-starter qualities and the spontaneous vitality that flatter, more ground-empowered systems (e.g. the

personal chain discipleship system) have. Cell leaders, who are the vital linchpins and coal-face operators of the whole cell group system, tend to be placed under layers of zone leaders who supervise them. What these redoubtable lay cell leaders really need are competent people to support and service them and to make their work lighter and more ministry effective rather than management compliant. Comiskey's assertion presents a content gap regarding supervision of the cell group that the researcher sought to examine.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Methodology is the way of searching or solving the research problem. (Industrial Research Institute, 2010). The methodology assisted the researcher in usage of different criteria for studying the research problem. The researcher examined the given questions systematically and found out all the answers till conclusion. All the problems that the researcher could possibly find were effectively resolved using correct research methodology.

This chapter therefore, presents the systematic methodology that was employed to accomplish the process of this research. It illustrates the research design, population of study and the sampling procedures. The chapter covers the sample size, data collection methods and instruments. Finally, the chapter expounds quality control measures, data analysis and ethical considerations used during the study.

3.1 Research design

While there is general consensus about classification systems among researchers who use quantitative research designs - how they are distinguished and what to call them - there is less consensus among qualitative researchers about designs. One leader in the field of qualitative research, Merriam (2009), notes that “there is almost no consistency across writers in how the aspect of qualitative research is discussed”. In planning a qualitative study, researchers think through the philosophical worldview that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice.

A qualitative evaluative research design was best suited for this study. Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Aware that preferences, individual histories, and beliefs cannot be fully bracketed and removed during the data collection and analysis stages (Kafle, 2011;

Laverty, 2008), taking St. Peter's Cathedral as a case study was best for this study as it challenged generalities made about broader cell groups and provided detailed understanding into the true experiences of people, such as cell group leaders and members and clergy within St. Peter's Cathedral - Tororo (Yin, 2017).

3.2 Area of study

St. Peter's Cathedral, is the seat of Bukedi Diocese (Church of Uganda). It was inaugurated in 1972, the year that the diocese was officially established.

The research was conducted at the Cathedral and amongst participants from the two parishes, that is, St. John the Evangelist and St. James Morukatipe that form part of the Cathedral. Data was also collected from the two daughter Churches of the cathedral, that is, St. Andrew's Amagoro COU and Nyangole COU.

3.3 Sources of information

The task of data collection begins after a research problem has been defined and research design chalked out. While deciding about the method of data collection for this study, the researcher kept in mind three types of data, that is, primary, secondary and tertiary data.

Primary Sources provided firsthand evidence about an event, object, person, or work of art. These sources were original materials that have not been filtered through interpretation or evaluation by others. These included: qualitative Interviews - that helped to detail information from individuals through semi-structured questions, Observations - where the researcher used an observation protocol to record behaviors or phenomena as they occurred naturally. Secondary Sources helped to analyze and interpret primary sources. Secondary data was obtained from books and articles that detail comprehensive works on Cell Group ministry. Tertiary Sources of data such as Encyclopedias and Dictionaries were used to define and clearly explain terms and concepts in the research.

3.4 Population of the study

Polit and Hungler (1999:37) refer to the population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. Like Anderson (2018) urges, effective evaluation intended to generate useful feedback requires a critically reflective practical discourse open not only to experts or policy analysts but to the public at large. The study population thus included respondents selected among the clergy, lay readers and the laity of St. Peter's Cathedral - Tororo (Bukedi diocese).

3.5 Sampling determination and sampling

Owing to the complexity of the study topic and the depth of data collection needed, the study focused on 25 interviewees. As urged by Yin (2011), having larger numbers is not the only way of boosting the confidence in a study's findings but rather the composition, not just the size. The participant criteria for the study included full-time clergy and selected laity from St. Peter's Cathedral and the churches under the cathedral. Special attention was given to clergy and laity who have been under the cathedral ministry for at least five years. This time period was chosen because the tenure is expected to be long for the participant to be submerged in the church culture and her policies.

The researcher used three different approaches to obtain participants. First, the researcher contacted the office of the Vicar of the cathedral to obtain contact referrals of potential participants that met the criteria via purposeful sampling. Secondly, the researcher used a snowballing strategy to complete the required sample.

3.6 Variables in the study

Independent variable: Cell Group Ministry. This variable was manipulated to observe its effect on church growth.

Dependent variable: Church growth. This, was observed in response to its implementation in St. Peter's Cathedral - Tororo.

3.7 Procedure for data collection

Data collection and management concerns the organisation of data, from its entry to the research cycle through to the dissemination and archiving of valuable results (Whyte and Tedds, 2011). Data management during the study was one that allowed reliable verification of results to be collected, yet permitting new and innovative research built on existing information. From a wealth of qualitative data that was collected, the researcher gave primacy to the data. Like Heading and Traynor (2005) advice, the researcher worked through the introduction process to determine the categories, patterns and working hypothesis for the study. Coding of categories was accomplished by examining the data for patterns and topics using words or phrases to represent the topics and patterns. Coding “facilitated the search for patterns and themes” in the data. Patterns that came out of the data were then used for data analysis.

3.8 Data collection methodology and instruments

According to Nueman (2007) “the topic under study dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants.” Semi-structured interviews were used as the main method of data collection for this qualitative study. These individual semi-structured interviews were conducted until saturation was obtained. Data saturation was only claimed when no new data or insights into the phenomenon were obtained (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher also gathered artifacts and documentation associated with each case. These offered contrary evidence or views, and this assisted the test of rival explanations during data analysis (Kuzel, 1992, cited in Yin 2011). This helped the researcher to avoid biasing the study and eliminate any appearance of bias by choosing only those respondents that confirmed the researcher’s own preconceptions.

3.8.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are viewed as a dynamic, meaning-making occasion where the actual circumstance of the aspect being studied is imported into the study (Berg, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face. Interviews were conducted in a place of comfort and quietness chosen by the participants and in a manner that ensured confidentiality and cooperation. This limited distractions and provided privacy. To ensure consistency in the research, the researcher used a set of semi-structured questions during each interview and this facilitated deep discussions in response to each question.

3.8.2 Observations and field notes.

During the study, the researcher noted observations that included participants' body languages and voice inflections. In order to provide a rich context during the study, the researcher made use of an observation protocol.

3.8.3 Documentary Analysis

Secondary data during the study was obtained from textbooks, diocesan reports, church policy documents and web-based information (Johl et al., 2012). Particularly, the researcher reviewed the Bukedi Diocesan Mission reports of 2018 and 2023, Provincial (Church of Uganda) Master Plan 2016-2025, Home Cell manual of Watoto. As guided by Yin (2011), a lot of emphasis during the study was laid on the review and analysis of documents on the Cell Group ministry to ensure that the researcher answered all the research questions. Further, the researcher spent time on the internet checking for quality and relevant information. The researcher was aware of the time consuming nature of this data collection and so data was sorted according to years of publication to ensure that only relevant data was selected.

3.9 Quality control

Validity and reliability in a research centers on 'trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility' (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the research process, the researcher made use of techniques that ensured credibility of the study. As Meriam and Tisdell (2016)

have suggested, the researcher made use of the five techniques below to ensure research validity and reliability.

Pre-testing of the research questionnaire. Prior to the interviews, the researcher pre-tested the tool to determine the effectiveness and identify any gaps in the questionnaire. The Assistant Vicar of the Cathedral and the youth leader who also is a member in the town cell were used to test the research tool.

Thorough record keeping. This was maintained throughout the research as a big step towards research transparency (Noble and Smith, 2015). The proceedings formed the basis where research interpretations were made. Managing to keep research notes and records allowed the researcher time for reflection and critical decision making, as this provided the research audit trail (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This, ensured that credibility and transparency was enhanced during the entire research process.

Rich and thick verbatim data transcription. As advised by Creswell (2000), the researcher made use of rich and thick data reporting. When read by those that didn't participate primarily in the study, they will experience the research. Through this procedure, much detail was provided to the study and as a result research subjects were placed in context to describe the part played during the research. This detail will definitely allow readers determine and make use of the research as it will speak to the situations that they face (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Respondent validation. The researcher allowed the respondents of the study to read and validate the final transcriptions as part of credibility (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Through this technique, respondents were able to confirm that the transcriptions contained only those beliefs and thoughts conveyed during the process of interviews.

3.10 Strategy for data processing and analysis

Like Pope (2000) has urged, "Analyzing qualitative data is not a simple or quick task. Done properly, it is systematic and rigorous, and therefore labor-intensive and time-

consuming”. As Yin (2011) advised, all the data that was collected from the 25 respondents as well as that from secondary sources was initially compiled and sorted to create a database for the research. Secondly, the data that had been compiled was broken into smaller fragments. The researcher then assigned new codes to the data. The researcher repeated this process as part of the ‘trail-and-error’ process, to test the codes and in a way account for the two-way arrow between the two steps. Afterwards, the researcher identified patterns of meaning across the dataset using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely recognized qualitative data analysis method and helps in interpreting peoples’ views (Braun and Clark, 2006). This method helped to answer the research questions that were being investigated.

The researcher then identified patterns through data familiarization, data coding theme development and revision. The researcher then reorganized the different themes into different groupings using the alteration fashion. Using the assembled phases, the researcher interpreted them to form a narrative that became an analytic portion of the first research manuscript. Throughout these phases, data assembling and re-assembling was being repeated by the researcher and this helped to manage any gaps that could arise during data interpretation.

Lastly, only conclusions that that related to phase four were drawn for analysis and eventual interpretation of the research results.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

In line with the research ethical guidelines as advised by Berg (2011), the researcher ensured the following, well aware of the cardinal responsibility to search for knowledge yet with an ethical responsibility of not putting the research respondents at risk at any time during or even after the study.

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology at UCU. This, alongside the University Identity card, served as introduction of the researcher to potential respondents.

The fact that theological research is a practical process that involved intrusion in peoples' lives was born in the mind of the researcher. The researcher deliberately established relationships with the respondents and used informed consent (Waliman, 2011). The research respondents were made to know the purpose and aim of the research, the procedures and risks involved and the voluntary nature of the research. Researchers were also informed of the procedures that ensured their confidentiality during and after the study. These measures reduced mistrust and ensured honest responses. Like advised by Berg (2011), identified participants that showed no interest in the study were politely asked not to take part in the study.

Further, in order to preserve privacy, all the detail including names and contacts of the respondents shall be kept under the careful guard of the researcher and will only be made available to BTS DT or even the University if there arises ethical issues related to the study. Finally, all literature as indicated in the study has acknowledgement of the authors.

Triangulation of data. Several sources of information were used to gather information and increase validity of the research. Other than the semi-structured interviews that was the main source and indeed provided rich detail about the study, the researcher made use of observation of the respondents (Merriam and Tisdell). The notes included all non-verbal communications such as tone of the language, facial expressions, body movements. These notes were added to the transcribed notes to give validity to the data collected and analyzed.

3.12 Anticipated methodological constraints

Due to the evaluative kind of the research, some difficulty arose in making the conclusions of the study. Further, being a majorly qualitative study with a sample of 25 respondents might be, to some researchers or actors, not as representative.

However, the researcher deliberately sought information that was protected against rival explanations or even undesirable biases. In addition, as guided by Jonker and

Pennink (2010), the researcher was aware and cautious that equipment failure and environmental conditions could threaten the study as it was undertaken

Finally, the researcher recorded each interview because the human mind tends to forget quickly. As a result, only respondents that reflected a composition not just the size of the larger group were selected.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings from the respondents. This is done concurrently with the discussion and analysis of the research findings regarding Cell Group ministry in St. Peter's Cathedral-Tororo (Bukedi diocese). The researcher recorded and noted down the participants' views that were used to interpret the meanings of the research findings in view of the literature reviewed in Chapter two of the study. The study findings that are presented and analyzed in this chapter are in line with the three research objectives and research questions, that is, that is, identify the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry; establish attempts by churches to address this decline; and examine the effects that Cell Group ministry has caused to the church.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In this section, an analysis of the respondents' distribution is presented. The study included a total of 25 carefully selected respondents that cut across clergy, lay readers, cell group leaders and laity within St. Peter's Cathedral deanery. The researcher provided the respondents with an atmosphere that facilitated and helped to understand how they appreciate Cell Group ministry in detail. Key issues were then discussed with the Vicar of the Cathedral, who also doubles as Diocesan Missions Coordinator, indeed a key informant in this study. As guided by Yin (2011), these offered contrary evidence or views, and this aided the test of rival explanations during the research.

4.2 Factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the Church

Christian failure to balance cell group and work.

Most of the cell group meetings are on week days between the hours of 16:00 to 17:000 hours. The exhaustion of cell group leaders has caused decline in the evangelism effort of the cell groups. It is thus important, like Kajolya (2009), recommends, that for time-poor urban dwellers, the calendar in cell groups should not be a "do-or-die" but instead

be one that allows the members to balance the ministry and work and not at any one time cause burnout but rather one that should provide support to members. Energizing and mobilizing laypeople is one task, and so the church leadership must be conscious not to over burden them with a lot of tasks. Secondly, the church today ought to learn from the early church where converts accepted to experience firsthand what it means to be wounded in the name of Christ at the coming of Christianity” (Magesa, 2021).

Little appreciation of the cell group as a central unit of the Church

Whereas the Cell group should be the lowest unit in any church, the members of the cathedral are yet to appreciate that. People prefer to appear on Sunday for service yet with little accountability to a small cell group. The church should rather be an intersection for members that daily and at most once a week meet in cell groups. The Head of laity remarked that,

“According to what I see, the cell group ministry is just there. It is not as strong as it should be in a set-up of a cathedral. Even the Christians have not yet understood the real essence of it”. Eng. Amos Avutia - Head of Laity - St. Peter’s Cathedral Tororo (July 25; St. Peters Cathedral Hall Tororo).

Double standard lifestyles of the cell group leaders

Considering that the Cell Group ministry is held within the vicinity of homesteads, its easy to witness how one lives. Cell group leaders whose lives does not depict the life of Christ have led to the loss of interest in the ministry by members. As Neighbour (2009), advised, because people seem to be rushed in the leadership of the cells, even those with a character that looks questionable are hurriedly taken on just because they are available.

The aftermath of Covid-19

Four of the respondents did argue that the Covid-19 pandemic caused fear among people and strengthen the cell group ministry because people were convinced that the end was near and Jesus’ return seemed unavoidable. The seeming delay in the return

of Jesus has led to the fading interest in Christian fellowships. However, after Covid-19 ended, people resorted to their normal ways of life and ignored the cell groups.

Lack of training for the Cell group leaders

The cell group leaders that exist currently were asked to commit or selected as volunteers because of their regular attendance to the Sunday service and their willingness to host the cell group meetings at their homes. These seems to be in tandem with Neighbour (2009) when he urged that if the cells are to multiply rapidly, the cell leaders do not necessarily have to be counsellors, evangelists or even season teachers but rather those that are lovers and willing to host the cells. The research found out that none of the 16 cell group leaders that are in the Cathedral had been formerly or informally trained about the cell group ministry or even about evangelism as a key component of the cell group ministry. There is also little time given to discipleship of these leaders by the cathedral or even deanery pastors. The other training need was how the Cell group ministry addresses the needs of the men, women, youth and children. It was observed and noted that in event where children are part of the cell groups especially during holidays, the Cell group leaders mobilise and call on the priests or lay-readers are invited to manage this ministry. Their absence means little or no ministry to this category of church goers.

No clear data on the cell group members

The research findings indicate that whereas the Cell Group leaders are well known to both the priests and amongst the cell group members, there is scanty information regarding the contact information of the individual members. The Cell Group leaders rather know atleast 50 percent of the members that regularly attend the Cell Group meetings (offhead), but this tends to fade regarding irregular cell group attendants. Because of this reality, it is challenging to ascertain when members migrate or move to other places of residence of work outside the cell group locations.

No clear format/flow of the Cell Group meetings

The research was unable to ascertain a clear flow of the cell group, either during the formal meetings are even at evangelism time. Rather, the cell groups seem to use the liturgy as used in the Sunday services. Two of the cell group leaders added that,

Beyond the normal cell group meetings, we allow for announcements then serve refreshments - Names withheld on request.

4.3 Attempts by the Church to address this decline

Provision of leadership by the clergy

The research respondents revealed that Cell Group ministry has a relationship with the leadership of the church at the time. For instance, since their inception in 2017, the then Vicar - Rev. John Mugoya invested time and effort in making the Cell group ministry known. The cell group ministry faced a setback during the previous administration and is now picking under the current leadership. The cathedral has assigned the assistant Vicar to specifically supervise and monitor the health of the cell groups. Further, the leadership at the cathedral is encouraging the clergy and indeed the church leadership to embrace cell groups. This rhetoric was confirmed by the Parish priest of St. John the Evangelist when he remarked,

As advised by the Vicar of the Cathedral, we have, as a church council, zoned the church into four zones, that is, Bison A, Bison B, Agururu A1 and Agururu A2. Each zone meets once on a Friday of the month. This will eventually be moved to weekly meetings. It is at that point that zones will be divided into zones. - Rev. Deacon Phillip Owor (July 26, 2024; St. John the Evangelist Tororo).

The findings above confirm what Comiskey (2023), asserted on leadership and supervision of cell groups when he urged that, wherever the cell group ministry has been successful, the supervisory leadership have been vital linchpins who have cell groups under layers of zone leaders.

Clear feedback channels

The church has provided clear feedback channels through which Cell Group ministry is being carried out. For instance, the six active cell groups in the Cathedral have Whatsapp platforms where regular communication is channeled. The two parishes of St. John the Evangelist and St. James Morukatipe have general church platforms where recordings of sharings and teachings from the zonal fellowships are shared with members. Cell group leaders periodically call and check on the members of their groups. This is also the case during an evangelistic mission. In addition, the cell members easily access their cell group leaders as they live in the same vicinity. In the event of eventualities such as death, the cell group coordinator through their zone leaders easily access the Reverends. Such, was the case in the Osukuru cell when they lost one of the members. Due to the easy communication channels, the church leadership was easily notified.

Efficient communication

From the research findings, the advice by Bertrand (2024) on culture, that,

“What works in one part of the world cannot be universally applied in another region where the cultural contexts are quite different”

seems to make sense amongst the Tororo community. Tororo district, where the deanery is found is composed of many tribes, with Ateso and Japadhola as the main local dialects. The respondents confirmed that in addition to English and Luganda, there is always a translator especially during ministry activities by the Cell Groups.

This is in agreement with what Markins (2020) called ‘Vernacularization’ in worship that must be expressed through the use of locally -composed choruses and songs, the narration of personal testimony, public Scripture reading, and preaching of sermons in the Church.

Regular announcements during church service and main events.

The research noted that the Cell Group ministry is being revived due to the frequent announcements made by the clergy in church services. The Cathedral priests also have a radio program of Rock Mambo FM, where the Cell Group meeting schedules and the

leaders of these cells are announced. Further, at church functions such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, the cell group ministry is part of the announcements made.

4.4 Effects that Cell Group ministry causes the church

Has enhanced church unity and fellowship

Due to the regular meetings, Cell groups have led to church unity. The cell group meetings are held on a rotational basis from home to home. Further, the home cell groups when on evangelism stay with the vicinity of the zones where they are located. As a result, people try to depict true Christian values as they live as a community without little pretense. This promotes a spirit of accountability and transparency to one another. In addition, unity has been witnessed through social networking not just amongst cell group members but as members that belong to the deanery. Beyond the Anglican faith, the research findings indicate that the cell groups are interdenominational and have people from other Pentecostal and Baptist churches meet to fellowship as a body of Christ.

Breeding ground for evangelists and church ministers

Through the Cell Group ministry, recent converts and Christian enthusiasts are disciple and also learn how to minister to others. One respondent remarked,

In 2018 when I started serving in the church, it is the home cell where I used to do my experimental preaching. I always called Cathy before and after my preaching for assessment. As you know preaching like that gave me the confidence and I can now preach boldly even in the Cathedral - Geoffrey Nabeeta (July 24, 2024; Lions Club Gardens Tororo)

Indeed such evangelist efforts have seen some conversion within the cell groups. For instance in Bison area, a Muslim converted to Christianity in August 2023 after the door to door mission by the cell group members. Same rhetoric has been made by Markins (2020) in what termed as “Aggressive Evangelism” which is the deliberate focus or ultimate purpose for every function or gathering is to win souls through conversions.

While explaining the evangelism role that the cell group has had in the community, one respondent remarked,

There is a family within our cell here, where the man used to pray at St. Peter's Cathedral but the woman was catholic. I learnt about it and walked to the home and requested that they allow two of their daughters to always attend our cell meetings. After 3 months, these girls brought their siblings along and one time I saw their mother coming. Eventually, she accepted Christ and although she is not a regular church attendant at the Cathedral our evangelism paid out - Robinah Jassa (July 26; Senior Quarters Tororo).

No wonder observers like Comiskey (2017) have urged against having people on payrolls to do ministry in cell groups, but rather have young people with self-starter qualities and empower them to be able to demonstrate leadership to both the cell groups and the church

Ensures church growth

The Cell Group through the evangelism efforts has led to the growth firstly the cell groups and resulted into the growth of the church within St. Peter's Cathedral deanery in what the respondents termed, "*Christianity being extended to the local person*". For instance the Cell Group in Nyagole had 12 people in 2022 but now boasts of 60 people. This is in line with what Kim (2008) advises that, "Along with evangelism, cell groups must have a clear focus on the fellowship characterized by love between believers (Koinonia).

Prayer life has grown

The testimonies from the Cell Group members indicated that people of the intentional effort to have members' spiritual life grow, the prayer life has been emphasized in the meetings. The Children especially have learnt to pray and replicate the same amongst their siblings. A one Yunisi Nwagi from Senior Quarters Cell group confirmed that the cell meetings have challenged her to read the word as a letter and not a book like any other. As a result, her prayer life is more personal and deeper. Bertrand (2024) seems

to agree with this preposition when he urges that the 4Ws, that is, Welcome, Worship, Word and Works must be a start feature in any cell group. (An extract from www.disciplewalk.com)

Contributed to Community wellbeing

The evangelism efforts by the cell groups have led to having new converts, including those that were causing harm to the community. The research findings indicate that 16 people formerly drunkards have given their lives to Christ. Relatedly, is the identification and support of needy people within the community. During one of evangelism efforts in Morukatipe, these were identified irrespective of religion or faith and supported with home needs. In what seemed an agreement to the above, one respondent, urged that,

“When I read Mathew 14, Jesus also cared for the needs of others and eventually preached to them. When we reach out to cell members in hospitals, pray and even offer them something, for me its an effective evangelism tool”- Robinah Jassa (July 26, 2024; Senior Quarters Tororo)

Such above is what Waliggo (2002) described that when the church has, an ethos of living out the solidarity that is demanded of the children of God, and submitted her priorities to the light of the gospel, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When this done, the church in Africa ably overcomes her suffering. Africans would be saved holistically and would live with the dignity that the Creator wishes for all who are made in his image.

Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the decline in cell group ministry in St. Peter’s cathedral is attributed to the failure by the cell group members to balance cell group ministry and work; the little appreciation of the cell group as the foundational and core unit that links the family to the Church; the lack of well-trained cell group leaders. The findings indicate that the church leadership has made attempts to address the decline by being exemplary and ensuring that there is efficient communication on the cell group

ministry. Finally, the research findings indicate that even in its current state, the Cell Group ministry has had positive effects on the members, the church and the general community as witnessed in family visits, conversion of non-believers and general increase in the numbers in St. Peter's Cathedral.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

5.0 Cell Groups in Church History

This section, presents biblical accounts that support the use of cell groups and discusses how the cell church has developed its principles based on these accounts. The New Testament is undoubtedly the best-documented source for cell-like structures in the Bible, serving as the main influence for the contemporary cell movement (Beckham 2017, 37-38). However, the inclusion of the Old Testament in this discussion is important due to the significant impact of one of its narratives on the development of the cell church structure.

5.1 Old Testament

Old Testament narratives encompass many values intrinsic to cell ministry, such as community, relationships, and fellowship, which have been analyzed and applied in the context of small groups (Comiskey 2008). When looking for cell-like structures, one particular story stands out: the account of Jethro's counsel to Moses.

This story, found in Exodus 18, reveals Jethro's observations regarding Moses: "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening? ... What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear themselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. ... Select capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain - and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens ... That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you" (Exodus 18:14-23).

In Jethro's proposed organizational framework, every group of ten individuals would fall under the leadership of one designated 'official' (leader), who would help members address their daily challenges (18:21-22). These leaders were carefully selected based on specific criteria, forming a supervision system that extended from leaders over thousands to those overseeing tens (Comiskey 2008). This strategy alleviated Moses'

burden and ensured that the people received timely and effective solutions to their issues (Exod. 18:23).

With this structure in place, Moses could focus on representing the people before God and equipping them through teaching (18:19-20). While he remained the leader of Israel, the new organization allowed for the delegation of responsibilities, fostering a shared leadership approach (Comiskey 2008).

Jethro's counsel has inspired many modern cell churches, serving as a foundational organizational structure that enables closer monitoring of members' situations, facilitates communication, and maintains a unified purpose through a supervisory network (Tay, 2022).

In the book of Joshua 2:1-24, it is recorded that, “Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho...” One might wonder, why Joshua sent out the spies. Yet, Joshua had the precedent of the leadership and example of Moses for this action of working through smaller groups, an action which was the result of God's own command in Number 13:1-2. Joshua was living and acting on the precepts of Scripture as he was commanded in 1:7-8. While Joshua had the promise of God's deliverance, he had not been given instruction on just how God would defeat the enemies they would face and so made use of a smaller team to spy the land. As a wise leader, he was simply gathering information concerning the layout of the enemies defenses, the condition of their moral, and other factors that would be important to any military campaign. He was to trust the Lord implicitly, but in that trust, make use of other leaders to help in the conquest of the land.

5.2 Jesus' Small Group

While the Old Testament offers limited insights into small group usage, with Jethro's advice as a notable example, the New Testament showcases an abundance of references to small groups, particularly in the form of house churches. Before exploring the church depicted in Acts and Paul's letters, it is essential to highlight Jesus' first small group, described in Mark 3:13-15:

“Jesus went up to the mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have the authority to drive out demons.”

Through His relationship with the twelve disciples, Jesus provided a timeless model for those involved in discipling new believers. For three years, He journeyed alongside His disciples, sharing meals and confronting challenges together. The twelve had firsthand experience witnessing Jesus preach, heal, and perform miracles among the masses. They were with Him during both his public ministerial activities and times of retreat and prayer, where He dedicated time for special teachings, evaluations, exhortations, and training.

Neighbour (2009) emphasizes that the community lifestyle Jesus fostered was vital for the disciples’ personal growth: “He created community for his followers. From men who would normally never even speak to one another, Jesus shaped twelve disciples. He lived with them for three years, modeling a lifestyle of love and acceptance.”

This community aspect is central to the cell churches today (Neighbour, 2009). Neighbour notes: “By living with twelve men, God in human flesh made a clear statement about how community develops. While thousands pressed him from every side, He chose to be with one cell of life.” The cell churches have learned that the most effective strategy to prepare members for God’s work is to allow them to closely observe their leaders.

The group Jesus formed had a unique character and dynamic, laying the groundwork for the first church leaders. Beckham (2017) discusses the necessity of forming a leadership core to oversee the church’s vision: “We must train a hard core of committed and growing disciples who will serve as leaven within the local church.” This core was modeled after Jesus’ instruction to His closest followers, as seen in the early chapters of Mark, where he deliberately trained them for leadership.

Conclusively, Jesus’ small group serves as a prototype for the church (Beckham 2017). This principle reminds us that the cell church does not emerge instantaneously; critical

factors, such as leadership, need to be established beforehand. The so-called ‘prototype period’ is intended to ensure these foundational elements are in place (Beckham 2017).

5.3 New Testament Church

If Jesus’ small group is viewed as a model for the community life He intended, then the church as depicted in the remainder of the New Testament—particularly in the book of Acts and Paul’s letters—demonstrates how this lifestyle was disseminated among all who joined His followers. This form of church has significantly influenced the development of the modern cell church (Beckham 2017).

Initially, the community of believers did not have dedicated buildings; instead, they convened in the temple and in homes (Acts 2:46; 20:20). However, this dual gathering dynamic was short-lived, as persecution led to house church meetings becoming the norm by the early first century (Comiskey 2007, 30). It appears that “from the beginning, homes served as the enduring foundation of early church life.” More importantly, the theological understanding of the church presented in the New Testament captures the essence of this practice.

Images such as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), living stones (1 Pet. 2:5), and God’s building (1 Cor. 3:9) lay the groundwork for New Testament ecclesiology. Small groups were seen as authentic expressions of the church, not merely subsets. This understanding, prominently seen in Paul’s letters, is reflected in the early church’s organizational structure (Banks 2000).

As Graham (2012) observes, “It seems clear that the New Testament church was organized along some kind of small-group or house-church lines,” as evidenced by numerous mentions of meetings in homes throughout Acts. Paul describes these gatherings as “the church in their house,” not merely secondary or voluntary gatherings, but the church itself (Graham 2012).

Beckham adds that Jesus had a design for His church, emphasizing participation over passive attendance: “They met in homes; worship was participatory; teachings often

occurred in small group contexts; the ‘agape meal’ was observed from house to house; gifts were exercised in small groups” (Beckham 2017). This structure enabled the New Testament church to embody the community life Jesus modeled, effectively spreading the Gospel both through word and action, even amid persecution.

The modern cell church aims to revitalize the principles that empowered the early church’s vibrancy and effectiveness, as Neighbour articulates: “The first-century church has returned to us in a simple, straightforward format, composed of deeply committed individuals who form cell groups. For them, like the early Christians, this is their ‘church’ and ‘basic Christian community’” (Neighbour 2009).

To achieve this, congregations must be willing to embrace change, adhering to the same ecclesiology that underpinned the New Testament church while evolving their structures to foster a renewed practice. This intention requires a conscious decision to undergo a transition process, which will be elaborated in the following sections. Next, we will explore how the church has transformed over the years and how movements and groups of believers are rediscovering small groups as essential to the church’s mission.

The writer of John 13:34, wrote that people will know we are Christ’s disciples by the way we “love one another.” Part of the way believers fulfill these “one another” texts in a small group is by using their spiritual gifts in that setting. While many members’ gifts can’t be used in public worship simply because of limited positions and need, they can be used in private worship. It is in a small group that people often can use and cultivate their gifts of hospitality, helps, mercy, teaching, and even evangelism (Gregory, 2018). Small group ministry is important and necessary for many reasons: God made humans to be in relationship. Many struggle with depression, fear, sickness, and other maladies simply because they lack a healthy community. In addition, when Christ came to save the world, he didn’t focus his ministry primarily on the crowds but on a small community of twelve, and three within the twelve. To model Christ, the early church practiced this ministry as well, and God multiplied them daily. To Gregory (2018), God does big things through small groups. We should be excited to participate in his ministry.

5.4 Joel Comiskey's Insights on Cell Group Ministry

(The following article excerpt is from Comiskey's book, *Myths and Truths of the Cell Church*, 2012).

Why Pastors Should Consider Implementing a Cell Church Strategy

Ralph Neighbour once stated, "Theology must breed methodology." This idea was central to his 1990 book, *Where Do We Go from Here?* Reflecting on this in 2011, over twenty years later, I've reached the same conclusion. The encouraging aspect is that the cell church strategy is deeply rooted in strong biblical theology. Biblical truth provides the only solid foundation upon which we can build our ministry and philosophy. With scriptural guidance, we can navigate any challenge that arises. The cell church is not just another trendy growth strategy; if it were, it would soon fade away with the next popular approach. In many areas, particularly the West, the cell church fosters a purification process rather than rapid growth, leading believers to deeper spiritual engagement.

Key Biblical Principles of Cell Church Ministry

1. **Making Disciples** Jesus' final command was to make disciples of all nations. At its core, cell ministry focuses on creating disciples who, in turn, make more disciples. Cell groups are instrumental in equipping leaders and fostering an environment conducive to disciple-making through multiplication.
2. **Evangelism** God took on human form to showcase His love and character. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, focusing on healing the brokenhearted and liberating captives. Following His example, evangelism within cell groups is primarily relational, engaging with communities and addressing their needs while fostering growth through multiplication.
3. **The Priesthood of All Believers** Unlike some churches that grow by simply filling seats, scripture affirms that all believers are priests. Cell groups enhance each believer's participation and enable the use of spiritual gifts in a supportive environment. I've authored several books on this topic and believe that cell groups are the most conducive settings for exercising spiritual gifts.

4. **Community** Our God is inherently relational, existing in constant unity among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus embodied this unity, never acting apart from the Father and Spirit (John 5:19-30). He instructed His disciples to maintain this same unity, stating that love and harmony among them would be the greatest testament to the watching world (John 17:6-26). Cell ministry promotes the one-another dynamics prevalent in scripture, challenging individualistic mindsets and fostering a culture of community and collaboration.

Throughout my ministry in North America over the last decade, my perspective has shifted from asking, “How can cell church work here?” to “How can we obey scripture and live in community?” This significant difference stems from a deeper commitment to scriptural mandates, as opposed to pragmatic approaches.

Theological Operating System Some readers may remember the early Windows DOS operating system from 1991. Initially, Microsoft attempted to merge DOS with its image-based system, leading to brief confusion among users. Similarly, my initial association of cell church with church growth was superficial. I hastily placed the cell church framework over my existing church growth paradigm, but soon realized that this approach was inadequate. Church growth theory sufficed in receptive contexts but fell short in areas needing revival.

Ultimately, I came to understand that a theological framework is the best foundation for both life and cell ministry. Improving church function through cell strategies should not be patched onto another operational model. Instead, I now advocate for a biblical theology that underpins cell ministry, recognizing that growth is not the ultimate goal; biblical truth is the essential motive guiding our efforts.

Cell church prompts a re-evaluation of conventional church assumptions, urging believers to explore the true essence of Christian life. It challenges individuals in materialistic cultures to uphold their commitments and engage actively in community. In many parts of the world, the cell church serves as a revolutionary call to embody the identity of the people of God and the Church of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

I wish to observe that the Cell Group Ministry must be deeply rooted within the church leadership and replicated in the church structure if it will have tangible outcomes. The cell groups, is the ideal gap-bridger between the home and the church and the pastors and those in leadership ought to be attention to this reality and be seen to work towards its realization and sustenance

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter sets out to summarize the research findings, draw conclusions and recommendations for the study, all from the presentation and analysis of the findings above. These, as presented are in line with the objectives and research questions of the study.

6.1 Conclusions

The central issue for this research was an examination of the relevance of cell-group evangelism and how this has affected church growth in St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese). This study therefore identified the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the church, established attempts by the church to address this decline and established the effects that Cell Group ministry has on the church.

The study identified several factors that are causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the Church. These include but are not limited to: Christian failure to balance cell group and work as Most of the cell group meetings are on week days and most of the members are exhausted on such days; the little appreciation of the cell group as the foundational and core unit that links the family to the Church; the double standard lifestyles of the cell group leaders - considering that the Cell Group ministry is held with the vicinity of homesteads; The cell group have leaders that have the passion yet without training and mentorship on the detail of the ministry. There is also little time given to discipleship of these leaders by the cathedral or even deanery pastors; and the scanty information on the data and details of the members of the cell group limits intentional follow-up by both the cell group leaders and the church leadership.

The research examined attempts by the leadership of the Cathedral and the parishes there under to address the decline in Cell Group ministry. These range from the provision of leadership by the present clergy that has led to the creation of zones and strengthening of the cell group ministry as a key evangelism tool in the Cathedral. There also exists clear feedback channels such as open calls to clergy, zonal and cell group

leaders, generic social groups for communication and quick response to the members in case of any need. The leadership has also ensured efficient communication by ensuring that people are communicated to in the local languages or those languages that they clearly understand. Finally is the deliberate awareness through regular announcements both during church services and events but also via the radio stations where the church has bought airtime.

From the research findings, Cell Group ministry even in its current state has had far reaching positive effects on the members, the church and the general community. Firstly, is the Church unity that has been strengthened through family visits and fellowships. This, in a way has promoted accountability and transparency in the church. The cell group ministry has been a key evangelism trait towards non-believers within St. Peter's cathedral geographical scope. Secondly, is that the cell groups have been a breeding ground for evangelists and church ministers. Many of the current youth leaders have been beneficiaries of the cell group ministry. Non-Christians have been led to faith due to the evangelism ministry. This has directly led to increase in the numbers of church members. Thirdly, is that due to the focus on reading the word however brief, bible reading discipline and prayer lives of members have improved. Finally, the Cell Group ministry has had positive impacts on the community. Cell group members often visit the sick in hospitals, pray and support them as part of evangelism. Further, the changed lives of drunkards, harsh men in the community but also non-believers have served as an example and drawn more to Jesus Christ.

6.2 Recommendations

Anderson (2018) has urged that congregations must express and experience diversity in cell groups through their worship, liturgy, theology, identities, and even resources. I am in agreement with such an argument and as such, the recommendations given are firstly a representation of what the clergy, laity and cell group members must experience in the cell group ministry, but secondly, it is what policy holders must envision for the cell group ministry. These recommendations are addressed to Uganda Christian University, St. Peter's Cathedral and Bukedi diocese.

Uganda Christian University needs to incorporate cell Group ministry during curriculum development, as one that creates the living linkage between Family and the Church.

St. Peter's Cathedral should facilitate trainings of the Cell Group members on the dynamics of the Cell Group ministry; Avail information to members regarding the available cell groups, the boundaries of each, the leadership of the cell groups and the meeting schedules for the cell groups; Support the Cell Group Members to create or improve a database of their members, to include residence, work stations, etc. This will ensure regular and intentional follow-up to the members; Sensitize the laity about the benefits of cell groups and challenge them to belong to one or even host one; and encourage celebrations and sharing of refreshments as part of the cell groups.

Bukedi diocese needs to assign and facilitate a clergy within the diocese to be in charge of the discipleship and all the training needs of the diocese. Such an officer, will ensure that training materials and Bible study materials for the Cell Groups are available. The training materials should be age specific to cater for the needs of children, young people and adults in the church. The diocese should also organise and facilitate a training seminar for all clergy on the role that cell groups play in the evangelism and mobilization of the church members.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear respondent

I am Barasa Patrick Nicholas, a student of Uganda Christian University, pursuing a Masters of Divinity of Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology. I am currently conducting a research titled, “examining the relevance of Cell Group ministry in Church growth, a case of St. Peter’s Cathedral Tororo (Bukedi diocese). I kindly request for your sincere and honest responses to my study. Please be assured that all the information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be used for academic purposes.

Part A: Interviewee details

Name: _____ Age _____ Level of education: _____
Marital status: _____ Parish/Church: _____

Objective 1: To identify the factors causing the decline in Cell Group ministry in the church

1. What are the primary reasons for the decline in participation in Cell Group ministry?
2. How have changes in societal attitudes and values impacted the effectiveness of Cell Group ministry?
3. In what ways do internal church dynamics (e.g., leadership, church policies) contribute to the decline in Cell Group ministry?
4. How do demographic shifts within the church congregation (e.g., age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) affect the engagement in Cell Group ministry?
5. What role does competition with other church activities or external commitments (e.g., work, social activities) play in the decline of Cell Group ministry?

Objective 2: To establish attempts by some churches to address this decline.

1. What specific strategies and programs has the church implemented to revitalize Cell Group ministry?
2. How effective have these strategies been in increasing participation and engagement in Cell Group ministry?
3. What role do church leadership and training programs play in addressing the decline in Cell Group ministry?
4. How have churches adapted their Cell Group ministry methods to be more relevant to modern congregations?
5. What feedback have church members provided regarding the attempts to address the decline in Cell Group ministry?

Objective 3: To examine the effects of Cell Group ministry in the church

1. How has Cell Group ministry impacted the spiritual growth and personal faith of church members?
2. In what ways has Cell Group ministry contributed to the overall growth and membership of the church?
3. What are the social and community benefits of Cell Group ministry within the church congregation?
4. How has Cell Group ministry influenced the church's outreach and mission activities?
5. What long-term effects has Cell Group ministry had on church unity and member retention?

APPENDIX II: PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATE



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APPENDIX III: INTRODUCTORY LETTER



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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15th March 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCTION LETTER FOR DATA COLLECTION

This letter serves to introduce to you Barasa Patrick Nicholas a student of Bishop Tucker School of Divinity pursuing a Master of Divinity/ Master of Arts in Theology/ Master of Arts in Theology and Development/ Master of Arts in Theology and Health care Management/ Bachelors of Divinity.

His/her is carrying out a research as a partial requirement for him/her to be awarded the degree he/she is pursuing. So kindly avail him or the required information for building his/her research work.

Counting on your cooperation and thank you in advance

Yours faithfully

Rev. Prof. Eddy Kansime

Research coordinator, Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology.

ekansime@ucu.ac.ug, 0772621182

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