

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CHURCHES IN UTHIRU WARD, KABETE CONSTITUENCY, KIAMBU COUNTY

<sup>1</sup>Thandi, David Ndiba, <sup>2</sup>Ombui, Kepha (Dr).

<sup>1</sup>Student, Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology

<sup>2</sup>Adjunct Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology

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**Abstract:** Many churches in Kenya have been plagued with a history of fighting, sometimes leading to horrible church splits. Therefore this project sought to put to rest the speculations into the conflict resolution in Churches in Uthiru Ward, Kiambu County in Kenya. Specifically, the objectives are to establish how power and control struggle conflict affect the Conflict resolution, identify how material issues/greed conflict affect the Conflict resolution and determine how ideological/theological differences conflict affect the Conflict resolution. The project applied a descriptive design. The population of the study was constituted by pastoral ministers from Pentecostal churches in Uthiru ward, Kiambu County in Kenya. The total number of these staff from the respective churches databases were 30 and due to the small size of the population, a census was done. Primary data was collected using questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis while quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics of percentages and frequencies. On power struggle conflicts, the study indicated that it was evident that struggle of power in church was due to a number of reasons. Majority of the pastors indicated that control of finance as a cause of power struggle. On greed, the respondents indicated that finance was the major cause of church greed since every party wanted its share. Most of the Pentecostals churches lack guidelines and procedures on how finance should be budgeted for, thus its misuse by the pastors. On ideological differences, majority indicated that different interpretation of the scripts was a factor that caused ideological differences in churches while a few stated that lack of unrealistic expectations from the scripts was a factor that caused ideological differences. Many churches have been plagued with a history of fighting, due to greed, power struggle and ideological differences; sometimes leading to horrible church splits. Church conflicts are creating a battleground for power struggles of various factions thus victimizing the congregation, sabotaging the pastor's leadership and church progress. Thus the study recommends that the adverse training and guidelines for severance benefits on the clergy is needed to enable them handle conflicts in church in case any future conflict is pastor –centered.

**Keywords:** Power and control struggle; Material issues/greed; Theological differences.

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## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Many churches in Kenya have been plagued with a history of fighting, sometimes leading to horrible church splits. Other churches report a continuous “backdoor” problem. Members leave with hurt feelings, frustration and disillusionment. Oftentimes, those leaving are good families who regretfully remove themselves from the ungodly atmosphere. They no longer are willing to tolerate the disturbing conflicts and have lost confidence in the church leadership. The church is supposed to provide a safe and peaceful refuge for god's people. Instead, church conflicts are creating a battleground for power struggles of various factions.

Contentious church members are allowed to be divisive and hurtful. This victimizes the congregation, sabotages the pastor's leadership and church progress. Somehow, they are allowed to “act up” without restraining their hurtful

behaviour and attitudes. The resentment and frustration level can lead to “character assassinations”, conspiracies against those in leadership, slander campaigns, secret meetings, boycott of tithes, resignations of church positions, and forced termination of ministers. These extreme measures victimize the whole congregation.

The moral relativism that accompanies a secular view of reality deeply affects the work of the church and its leadership (Fisher, 1996). Far too many good pastors are being driven out of ministry, leaving thousands of churches weak and vulnerable to spiritual attack. Without good leadership denominational factions multiply, evangelism declines, divorces proceed unrestrained, discipleship loses direction and missionaries are forgotten (Sande, 2004).

Congregational conflict, defined as a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires, may occur when those religious and spiritual beliefs are unaligned (Sande, 2004). This misalignment may take on a psychological dimension, since members look to the church for comfort and reassurance in a rapidly changing and threatening world (Hadden, 1970). Instead of a place of comfort and reassurance, church conflict can create a battle ground for power struggles of various factions, victimizing the congregation and sabotaging pastoral leadership and church growth. A pastor is most often forced out of ministry due to lack of success at resolving differences with other people within the church (Sande, 2004).

Ken Sande (2005) points out that church conflicts center around the desires of people. Some desires such as that of power and control are inherently sinful. On the other hand there are many good desires or ideas that can take on a controlling nature. It is sad to say, but many times these good desires, if unchecked, may cause major division in the local congregation.

Conflicts arise from basic human instincts where there is competition for resources and power. Even the societies and institutions people create result in inevitable interpersonal struggles. Allen (2005) stated that at the center of all conflicts are human needs. People engage in conflict either because they have needs that are met by the conflict process itself or because they have (or believe they have) needs that are inconsistent with those of others. My major point for now is that people engage in conflict because of their needs, and conflict cannot be transformed or settled unless these needs are addressed in some way.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

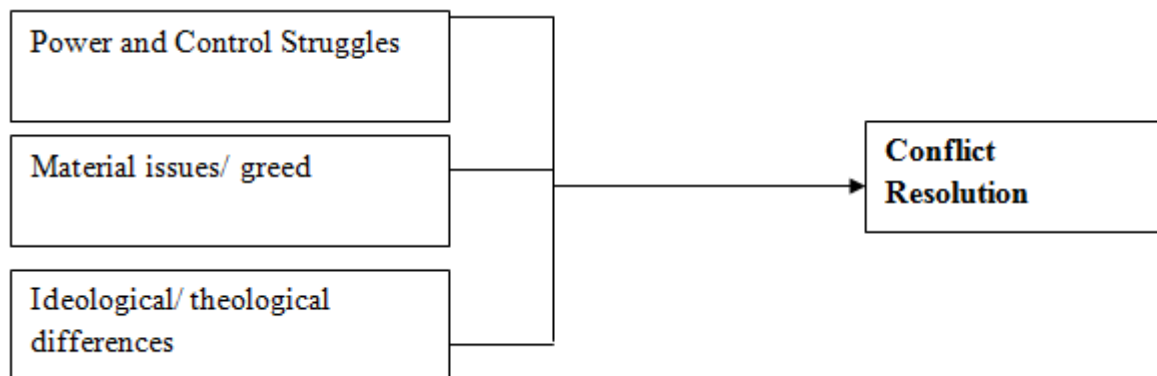
Conflict within the church is a result of several organizational and individual factors. The loyalty of members to their organizations affects whether they will exit when their organizations do not meet their expectations (Hirschman, 1970). Every society, organization, group, and family creates a culture of conflict. A complex set of words, ideas, values, behaviors, attitudes, archetypes, customs, and rules that powerfully influence how its members think about and respond to conflict. Cultures of conflict are shaped in and by our experiences (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2005).

Churches develop distinct cultures that comprise local understandings of identity and mission and that can be understood analytically as bundles of core tasks and legitimate ways of doing things (Becker, 1999). “Participating in church life is a very local matter to people. It is their church in their community; it is their worship service, their music program, their budget and their cemetery” (Lehman, 1985). For this reason it is important, when looking at church member behavior, as it relates to conflict.

Research has shown that many Church conflicts are related to religious leadership (Becker, 1999). The stability of Churches is affected by their clergy leaders. Whether members are willing to follow these leaders depends on the leader’s legitimacy. Leaders who are perceived as legitimate face fewer challenges in their ministry; older experienced educated males tend to have more legitimacy than younger less educated and experienced females. Therefore this project seeks to put to rest the speculations into the conflict resolution in Churches in Uthiru Ward, Kiambu County in Kenya.

### *Objectives Of The Project*

- I. To establish how power and control struggle conflict affect the Conflict resolution
- II. Identify how material issues/greed conflict affect the Conflict resolution
- III. To determine how ideological/theological differences conflict affect the Conflict resolution

**Conceptual Framework****3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The project applied a descriptive design. This design refers to a set of methods and procedures that describe variables. It involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data. Descriptive studies portray the variables by answering who, what, and how questions. Population can be defined as a complete set of individuals, cases, objects with some common observable characteristics of a particular nature distinct from other population. Target population is defined as the population to which a researcher will generalize the results of a study (Kothari, 2004). The population of the study was constituted by pastoral ministers from Pentecostal churches in Uthiru ward, Kiambu County in Kenya.

A census was conducted on the pastoral ministers in the Pentecostal churches in Uthiru Ward Kiambu County. The total number of these staff from the respective churches databases were 30. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), at times the target population may be so small that selecting a sample is meaningless and therefore taking the whole population in such cases is advisable.

Primary data was collected using questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire had open and close ended questions which were administered to the pastoral ministers. The data analysis was conducted where qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis which entailed analysis of themes in line with the objectives of the project. On the other hand, quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics of percentages and frequencies.

**4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study considered the demographic information of the respondents. The target population included responses from pastors from Uthiru ward. The researcher initiated the Data Collection from the selected churches in the sample of the study by enquiring on their demographic information in terms of number of branches the church has and years the church has been operational. Most of the pastors (33%) indicated that they had been operational for 11 to 15 years while a closer percent 30% stated that they had been operational for 6 to 10 years. On the other hand 27% pointed out that they had operational for 16 to 20 years. A few 3% indicated that they had been operational for over 20 years. This is a clear indication that they had experience and therefore would give viable information that would aid in making comprehensive conclusion. On number of branches, majority of the responses indicated that their churches have 2 to 3 branches in Uthiru ward. People will take sides with the leader or worker that they personally support. It seems everyone wants to be a part of someone's fan club. This first section shows the causes of power struggle in church and its effects as a conflict.

***Causes of Power Struggle in Churches***

The study shows that it was evident that struggle of power in church was due to a number of reasons; control of the finance kitty brought about power struggle since every group wants its pie share; age dominance was another cause since they young and energetic felt it was their time to rule and as for many churches the old lay men have become resistant to such changes and lastly there is favoritism in selection of group members in churches since the clergy appoints the rich and elite and the poor are left out thus resulting to power struggles in church since each group wants representation.

An overwhelming majority (66%) indicated that finances was the major cause of leadership struggle in the church while 27% stated that age difference was the major cause of leadership struggle in the church. A few (7%) stated that church control was the major cause of leadership struggle in the church.

### ***Effect of the Causes of Power Struggle***

Majority of the pastors (66.7%) indicated that control of finance as a cause of power struggle was to a more extent. Forty percent stated that modernity in terms of management and style of worship as a cause of power struggle was to a more extent. On the other hand, 56.7% said that Control of management by young and energetic from old lay men as a cause of power struggle was to a more extent. Lastly 73.3% indicated that Clergy leaders favoring the rich and elite in church positions as a cause of power struggle was to a more extent.

### ***Material Issues/ Greed Conflict***

This is one of the major areas over which churches and their members can become divided. Anytime a church must cut its budget and salary cuts follow or staff are let go, conflict is bound to follow. The first sub section shows the causes of greed as a conflict and its effect on the church.

The respondents indicated that finance was the major cause of church greed since every party wanted its share. Most of the Pentecostals churches lack guidelines and procedures on how finance should be budgeted for, thus its misuse by the pastors. The extreme consequences have led to rise in greed of power in churches which in turn result to unnecessary chaos in churches.

The study findings show that an overwhelming majority (60%) indicated that their churches did not have a streamlined procedure on budgeting of finances whereas a few 40% stated that their churches had a streamlined procedure on budgeting of finances.

The study findings show that majority of the pastors (50%) indicated that the parish minister was the one in charge of finances while 30% stated that the teaching elders were in charge of the finances in church. A few (10%) indicated that the deacon was in charge of finances in the church.

### ***Effects of Material issues/ greed on Church Management***

The study findings show that most of the respondents (40%) agreed that character assassination was a cause of greed in churches. Sixty percent agreed that a conspiracy against those in leadership was a cause of greed in churches and this was supported by 40%. On the other hand 66.7% agreed that boycott of tithes was a cause of greed in churches while 36.7% agreed that slander campaigns were a cause of greed in churches. A further 66.7% agreed that resignations from church positions were a cause of greed in churches. An overwhelming 60% strongly agreed that forced termination of ministers was a cause of greed in churches while 46.7% agreed that secret meetings were a cause of greed in churches.

### ***Ideological and Theological Differences Conflict***

Every pastor knows the challenge of trying to satisfy the theological itch that strikes different member from time to time. It is very difficult dealing with those who want to transplant spiritual renewal from one geographic setting to another. The first sub section shows the causes of ideological differences, effects and methods used for conflict management resolution.

Majority of the respondents (70%) indicated that different interpretation of the scripts was a factor that caused ideological differences in churches while a few (20%) stated that lack of unrealistic expectations from the scripts was a factor that caused ideological differences. On the other hand, 10% indicated that misreading of scripts by the clergy was a factor that caused ideological differences.

### ***Effects of Causes of Ideological Differences***

Majority of the respondents (60%) agreed that conflicting vision for the church was a cause of ideological differences while 53.3% agreed that personality conflicts with church member was a cause of ideological differences. On the other hand, 66.7% agreed that unrealistic expectations from church cause of ideological differences. An overwhelming 83.3% agreed that lack of clear expectations on church members was a cause of ideological differences while 63.3% agreed that personality conflicts with the senior Pastor due to theological differences was a cause of ideological differences.

***Conflict Management Model***

The study findings show that the pastors under study gave different opinions in regard to models they used namely; Biblical Scripture, Mediation, Negotiation and Peace Makers Conflict Management Model. Most of the respondents (35%) indicated that the pastor got involved in managing conflict when the conflict impacted the unity of the church while 30% stated that the pastor intervened in a conflict when conflict could not be solved by parties on their own. On the other hand 15% said that the pastor got involved in managing conflict when conflict impacted leaders of the church while 12% stated that the pastor got involved in managing conflict when conflict was brought to his attention. A few (8%) indicated that the pastor got involved in managing conflict when the conflict involved the pastor.

It was evident that majority of the pastors (60%) indicated that their experience after conflict management process was made is that they believed that people stayed while less than a half (30%) stated that their experience after conflict management was that they believed people left anyway. However a few (10%) were unsure what their experience was after conflict management process.

**5. CONCLUSION**

Many churches have been plagued with a history of fighting, due to greed, power struggle and ideological differences; sometimes leading to horrible church splits. Other churches report a continuous “backdoor” problem. They no longer are willing to tolerate the disturbing conflicts and have lost confidence in the church leadership. Church conflicts are creating a battleground for power struggles of various factions thus victimizing the congregation, sabotaging the pastor’s leadership and church progress. Power, leadership and ideological struggles have resulted to resentment and frustration level. The extreme measures have amounted to “character assassinations”, conspiracies against those in leadership, slander campaigns, secret meetings, boycott of tithes, resignations of church positions, and forced termination of ministers.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Conflict in the church is a major divisive issue and yet the educational system is not preparing men and women entering the ministry on how to deal with it. Thus the study recommends that the adverse training and guidelines for severance benefits on the clergy is needed to enable them handle conflicts in church in case any future conflict is pastor –centered and it is decided that the pastor will resign. Secondly the church should establish an independent body in its church by laws that will govern on the expenditure and budget of church finances so as to reduce its mismanagement by the clergy. The procedures for conflict resolution must identify the leadership group that is responsible to handle the grievances in regard to misconduct of its clergy in regard to their ideological differences. Lastly the church by laws should have procedures and policies on election of the leadership in church this will aid in reducing power struggles in church.

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