

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE CHURCH

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

In the context of our discussion, communication in the church can be defined as *the use of words, actions, reactions, appearance, moods, signals, fellowship and prayers* to reveal God's work of transformation in our lives and build stronger relationships with God.

INTRODUCTION

Communication in the church requires the following:

1. Two or more parties
2. Understanding of the means of communication between two parties or among several parties
3. Managing disagreements without the church disintegrating, with emphasis placed on that which edifies or builds up.

Simply stated, the purpose of all divine communication is to unite people with God. In order to unite people to Himself, God somehow had to communicate Himself to some men. Then, God chose to use men to whom He had communicated Himself as instruments to communicate Himself to others (**2 Timothy 2:2**). Hence, every elder, deacon, teacher, preacher, coordinator, zonal leader, church worker, aged woman, wife, husband, father or youth is an instrument of communication in the church. Once there is effective communication in the church, it implies that the instrument of communication is progressively taking on the nature of God. The more he takes on the nature of God, the more united with God he becomes.

When dealing with one another, we must learn to communicate with people in a way that would be pleasing to God. We all need to learn to communicate, understand, and learn to grow with one another. We as instruments of communication must be careful not to use the mediums of communication (*words, actions, reactions, appearance, moods, signals, fellowship and prayers*) to draw attention to ourselves, our beauty, our achievements or our oratorical abilities, but to draw attention to the cross of Christ, to Christ Himself.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE CHURCH

In seeking spiritual maturity, it is essential that we keep the *communication line between God and ourselves open* and the *communication lines among ourselves open*. This is essential to our spiritual growth.

In **Acts 6** a problem arose in the church: “. . . a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food” (**Verse 1**). Someone was needed to handle the problem: “So the twelve [the apostles] summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, *‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables’*” (**Verse 2**). They said, “Brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task” (**Verse 3**). The apostles’ instruction “found approval with the whole congregation,” and they chose seven men for the job, including Stephen and Philip (**Verse 5**). By implication, we know that the apostles trusted the members to make the right choice. *How would the apostles have achieved this resolution if the communication lines were not kept open in the church?*

In **Acts 15** we read about a controversy regarding the circumcision of Gentiles: ...the brethren [at Antioch] determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. . . . When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders. . . . The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter (**Verses 2-6; 22-23; Acts 16:4**). *How would the apostles have achieved this resolution if the communication lines were not kept open in the church?*

The only tool church leaders (*elders, deacons, evangelists*), youths’, zonal and women leaders and coordinators, group leaders and advisers, heads of committees, can use to guide Christ’s church, to enhance the growth of the church, to inspire the flow of fervent love, to strengthen the faith of members and so on - ***is their ability to communicate and communicate effectively***. In the business of effective communication, people are most important! “To the church leader and worker, the “job” is the people! Creating best opportunities to understand the members and build a strong fellowship with them.

If their communication skills are good, the church is likely to be united and growing; if their communication skills are poor, the church is likely to have problems. A church that lacks effective communication becomes a house that is divided against itself and cannot stand.

To understand the importance of communication in the church, we must appreciate the importance of the steps and skills of communication. What kinds of communication skills do we need for the church to glow with love and righteousness? What kind of communication steps we must take for the church to build, maintain and enjoy strong fellowship with God and her members?

The Steps And Skills Of Communications

- 1. *The listening skill or to listen as a step:*** The ability to listen well is the most important communication skill needed by all and especially church leaders. Sometimes we forget that communication is a two-way street. Sometimes church leaders see communication solely as a monologue: They speak, and their followers listen; they command, and their followers obey. Given the nature of the leadership of the church, however, leaders are obliged to listen well to their followers. As a shepherd would give his attention to a sheep or a parent to a child, so the church leader must listen to the members of the church. This also applies to all other members including youths’ and women leaders and coordinators, zonal leaders, group leaders and advisers, heads of committees.

James 1:19-20 tells us to *be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*. The first striking word is ***swift to hear*** – *to be genuinely interested to listen and understand*. We listen with the goal to understand. This means that we need to listen with empathy, trying to see the matter from the other person’s point of view. Everyone likes to talk and be listened to. But

when there is conflict, it is crucial that both parties **actually** listen to one another. Too many times we just want to talk and get our point across—the problem is that they do too. As long as both parties think this way, nothing will be resolved.

James also added that we must be *slow to wrath* - learn self control. We have to be the master over our temper or mood. Before we quickly respond in the heat of the moment, let's remember that we are talking to someone who has a soul. Someone who, by our words and actions, may be won to Christ, or forever put off to Him. So we treat him as we would want to be treated. Listen to his side. Have you ever spoken out of turn? Have you ever been so frustrated that you said something that you later wish you could take back? Unfortunately it can't be taken back. So we must be very, very careful what we say. In fact, the very first thing that we should challenge ourselves to do this is *listen*. In listening, there is the possibility of understanding the context of the problem, and reduces the intensity of first-time reaction. Whenever we speak out of anger we often do so in *unrighteousness*.

It will be tempting to just allow anger to take over and immediately speak our mind. However, we must not. If we want to learn to communicate with someone, we must learn to control our tongue. We must learn to actually listen to the other person's perspective. So, we must learn to **control the urge to speak our mind**.

Let's learn to put on a calm face. Make sure we let them know (by our face) that we are actually listening, calmly listening, to what they are saying.

Learn to look at the speaker directly in the eyes. Don't pay attention to the stuff going on around you. Don't roll our eyes back and forth in our head. Make sure that they know that for that time, while they are speaking, we are focused on them.

Let's learn not to interrupt. Listening is just that, listening. No part of listening includes interrupting. Interrupting people when they are talking is both disrespectful and very irritating.

Learn to validate what they are saying. Validating what they have said is very important. It lets them know that we truly have been listening. When we begin to speak, make sure to clarify our understanding of their points. Validation is so important because it allows the other person to know that we really do understand where they are coming from. After listening, our response may not be immediate. We must respond carefully. We must be careful what we say after listening to the other person.

How can we as Christians learn to love, actually love, if we do not even know how to communicate with one another? *What if the church leader does not learn to listen well?* From the standpoint of having to listen to individuals who come to him with their problems, if the leader fails to develop good listening skills, this is a problem that will literally go away! That is, *people will quit coming to him to tell him their troubles!* If others refuse to share their problems with him, *his ability to lead will be hindered, the church will be stagnant and the unfruitful works of darkness increases.*

Effective communication, builds close relationships, solves problems on time and eases the burden of the work of leaders.

- 2. The discussion skill or to use discussion groups as a step:** The success of church leaders often depends on how they communicate in discussion situations in small group settings. Such communication opportunities occur frequently in the life of the local church—in elders' meetings, elders' and deacons' meetings, and special meetings called

by the church leaders to discuss one or more questions relating to the work of the church.

These types of discussions work best when they are about the *"ways and means"* of getting work done, when the Scriptures set the ultimate goal and the discussions focus on how the congregation can best mobilize its resources to accomplish that goal.

In dealing with methods in the realm of expediency, small group discussions are valuable. When the elders indicate a willingness to discuss matters with a group, they let the members of the group know that they are important. They use a participatory style of leadership which is highly recommended. Decisions reached as a result of discussion are more likely to represent a consensus of the congregation and to be supported by the congregation than are administrative decisions. Within a discussion setting, leaders can explain their ideas as equals. Standing in front of the congregation suggests that the leaders are superior to the congregation. People often do not like to have decisions "handed down from above," as from a superior. Possibly, they can be persuaded by leaders who take positions among them as equals and who are willing to listen to them.

Leaders need to define the goal of a discussion. Any discussion should have a goal—an objective to achieve. The ability to present ideas in a few words, in a non-threatening, non-authoritarian way, yet in a way that will likely gain acceptance. Those involved need to be aware of and accept that goal. The goal ought to be for the group together to discover the best way to accomplish a common objective.

When church leaders determine the goals of the church, before initiating actions to accomplish those goals—effective communication require that they make detailed plans concerning the work of the congregation known to the congregation. If the decision is made, for example, that *"every visitor will be visited,"* then that becomes an *"action goal."* *How is it to be accomplished? "How will we get the visitors' names and make visitation assignments?" "Who will do the visiting?" and "When will it be done?"*

Too often, church leaders copy programs which have proven effective in other congregations without considering whether or not those plans suit their situation. Effective communication among leaders, deacons, evangelists and church workers, helps to determine if the programs will be effective if directly copied or modified.

In these small group discussions, leaders should promote good attitudes. They can both encourage and require good attitudes in the discussion. This requires them, for one thing, to model Christian behavior in the discussion. Ridicule, sarcasm, and prejudicial statements are out of place. A good attitude involves each one in the group respecting everyone else in the group; everyone has a right to have his say, whether or not he agrees with the majority. The church would be stronger if we could learn to disagree without disintegrating.

Leaders should encourage participation. They should see their responsibility not so much as making sure that they have their say as making sure that everyone else has his say. A genuine appreciation for others, for their talents and their views and a sincere desire to hear what they have to say on a subject. A genuine concern that the group hear every member, and an ability to bring reluctant or shy members into the discussion. Leaders must learn to keep a discussion on track and moving toward a goal—perhaps by summarizing what has been said so far, what consensus has been reached, or what cannot be agreed upon at this time, and then suggesting where the discussion ought to go next. They must also learn to end the discussion: to sense when the discussion has

gone “about as far it can go,” and/or when a consensus has been reached, to be able to say what has been accomplished or state the consensus in a satisfactory closing statement. This also applies to all other members including youths’ and women leaders and coordinators, group leaders and advisers, heads of committees.

Effective communication encourages greater participation of members in the work and growth of the church.

- 3. *The motivation skill or to use motivation as a step:*** The ability to motivate others is one communication skill which everyone, especially church leaders need more than any other. Consider the following situation – On Sunday morning service, the building is only half full, the size of collection is not measurable to the needs of the congregation, members live like princes and give like paupers, few visitors are present, those who have come this Sunday morning look as if they hate being there. They look unhappy or sleepy, or both; they say “hello” only to a few close friends and say nothing at all to the visitors, they sing, if at all, in whispers; they nod through the sermon, when the final “Amen” is said, they are out of the building as if they had entered a 100-meter race.

In this situation, the church leaders know that about two-thirds of members will not return for the Sunday evening service. Worst of all, the elders are aware that many of them do not live as Christians; from Monday through Saturday they are not different from the people of the world. What should the elders do? It is enough to make conscientious leaders cry and lose sleep. Sometimes church leaders respond to this kind of scenario by talking about the problem. The elders may spend hours every week complaining about the members’ lack of dedication. They may be frozen by discouragement, unable to plan what to do next because of their obsession with the members’ unfaithfulness.

Sometimes church leaders respond by talking to the problem. From the pulpit they—elders, preachers, or others—constantly and indiscriminately berate the members for their failure to serve wholeheartedly, even though some, or many, are dedicated Christians. The result is not likely to be an increase in faithfulness. Is there a better way? What should church leaders do when church members are lukewarm? Church leaders, rather than bemoaning the problem, need to look for ways to encourage the members to be more faithful. They need to learn the skill of motivation.

Church leaders and others must be concerned about motivating other members. Many Christians know what they ought to do, but simply do not do it. ***Motivation is necessary.*** The person who needs to diet must be motivated to stay on a diet, and the Christian who is lukewarm must be motivated to become dedicated. We should provide an environment in which it is possible for others’ self-motivation to bloom and grow.

Leaders can motivate the church by encouragement, through qualitative ministry and by entrusting responsibility.

Qualitative ministry involves the leaders’ spending time in prayer and preparation for the ministry of the Word. Before the church leaders communicate a goal and a plan to the church regarding her work, they must have spent time in prayers and adequately prepare for it. For example, the church wants to deal with the issue of drinking alcohol and immodest dressing. In-depth prayers must be engaged and sound biblical research done to determine the most convincing way to reveal to the members what the Bible actually stated on such issues so that there won’t be repetition of the same issue year after year rather there will only be strengthening of the church stand and this will give

the church good time to go on more deeper things of the spiritual living. (*Hebrews 6:1* ¹ *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.*)

Entrusting responsibility - Means said, It is morally right to involve people in decisions that affect them. . . . People are seldom properly motivated when they are excluded from the process. Church leaders should recognize that the more people are involved in group thinking and pooling their talents and energies, the more they are motivated to achieve worthwhile objectives. . . . Involvement of each member is a major goal of leaders. The aim of church leaders should not be solely, or primarily, to do the work of the church themselves. It is rather to enable all the members to serve the church with the talents God has given them.

Effective communication enhances motivation of members toward godliness, encourages greater participation of members in the work and growth of the church.

4. ***The analysis skill or to analyze a situation as a step:*** Leaders and workers in the church should start thinking about specific members. While addressing absenteeism in the church - trying to look at why all absentees are absent, there should also be another drive towards specific members. For example, "Why does *Bro. Emezana* only come to church services once a month?"

A leader cannot persuade an absentee unless he knows something about the nature of the absentee. Let's say an absentee is *Bro. Emezana*. We need to know *Who is Bro. Emezana?* What are his circumstances? What moves him? What does he care about?

We need to recognize and understand the very real problems that people have in living their Christian lives, in not coming to church services, in serving in the church; then we can try to resolve those problems.

We need to recognize that sometimes members have valid reasons for not doing more. Consider the attendance of worship services. Some can come in the morning but cannot come in the evening. Some cannot come because they are sick. Some cannot come because they don't have transport. Some have a problem driving at night. Some cannot come because of a pressing family need. If we will take the members' real problems into consideration, make plans accordingly, and then communicate those plans to the members, it is likely that the members will be motivated to respond positively to those plans.

We should learn to base our appeals on the felt needs of the people we are trying to motivate. We should learn to help other members change their priorities, in order for them to see that every righteous desire can best be fulfilled in and through the godliness and faithful service in the church. They can show them that in being saved, living faithfully in the church, and going to heaven, many or most of their immediate needs and desires will be satisfied. Church leaders need to put themselves in the place of others and ask, "What would make us want to change our behavior?"

Effective communication helps us to understand better what others are going through in trying to become better Christians.

5. ***The skill of setting godly examples and building close relationships:*** Leaders who set good examples are likely to motivate followers. According to **1 Peter 5:3**, elders are to "be examples to the flock." That suggests that whatever the leaders want the flock to be

and do, they should themselves be striving to be and do. Of course, they will not always provide a perfect example. They might sometimes slip and fall. Even in their failures, however, they can provide good examples. They can demonstrate how Christians should respond when they fall—how they seek forgiveness and then renew their efforts to serve Christ. Showing good examples (*in our speech, dressing, habits, principles, behaviour....*) has been proven in the Bible as one of the most penetrating way of communication in the church.

Philippians 4:9 ⁹ *The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.* **1 Timothy 4:12** ¹² *Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* **Titus 2:7-8** ⁷ *in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,* ⁸ *sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.* **1 Timothy 2:9-10** ⁹ *in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,* ¹⁰ *but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.* **1 Peter 3:1-2** ¹ *Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,* ² *when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.* **1 Timothy 3:4-5,7** ⁴ *one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence* ⁵ *(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);* ⁷ *Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.* **Romans 2:24** ²⁴ *For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.*

Encouragement comes most effectively from those who are our close friends. Furthermore, there is evidence that the closeness of our relationships with other Christians is one way which determines whether or not we will remain faithful. Hence, our contact with ourselves should not be only in the public assemblies. It should stretch into home fellowships, families devotions, positive inclined groups, positive recreational outing

New members need a special relationship with other Christians. It should be close—deeper than just saying “Hello” after services. It must be established quickly. Research indicates that if these relationships are not quickly established, converts are likely to fall away. “The first six months are crucial. New people not integrated into the body within that period are well on their way out the back door.” It should be regular—it will not do just to see and know the new member at our meetings; we need to exhort him daily (**Hebrews 3:13**).

When people come into the church, they are often looking for togetherness. Let us make sure they find it. We can establish contact with the new convert at as many points as possible. For me to be the teacher and him to be the learner means that we are related at one point. That ties us to one another with one cord. If we also have in common the fact that we have wives, we have children, we are unmarried, we work in the same place, we have the same hobby, and we enjoy the same recreation, *we are related not just in one way (as teacher and learner), but in five ways.* We are, as it were, bound together by five cords. That kind of personal relationship is more likely to help the new convert stay faithful than one in which we are related only on a teacher/learner basis. We can help the new convert become closely acquainted with as many members as possible. We can practice hospitality and emphasize fellowship; through the sharing of

food, ideas and counsels, personal relationships are established. We can integrate the member into the program of the church as quickly as possible—attending Bible class, becoming involved in the strategic meetings, participating in works in the church, and working with other members. As we work together, we strengthen our personal relationships.

Effective communication emphasizes the power of godly example ship. Effective communication explains the power and reveals the beauty of close relationship.

- 6. The skill of public communication:** Church leaders must need to do well in communicating with the congregation, using both oral and written means. The quantity of public communication needs to be frequent. The quantity of communication must be high. There must be a commitment to openness in the leadership that causes the leaders of the church to determine to keep the members “*in the know*” all the time. One elder said that in the congregation with which he worked the elders do not consider the congregation informed about a matter until the congregation has been told about it five times.

Public communication needs to be as positive as possible (obviously, it is not always possible to be positive). Leaders should, as much as possible, choose the positive way. A steady diet of negative pronouncements is likely to lead to “heartburn” and ultimately result in spiritual malnutrition. Church leaders can learn a lesson from Paul, who never failed to deal with the problems in the churches to which he wrote, but generally began his letters to the churches with something positive, such as “*I thank my God for you. . .*” (***See Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philipians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3.***)

At the leaders’ disposal are a number of means which can be used in public communication:

- An open invitation to talk with the elders individually or as a group at any time
- Called meetings of the membership to keep the members informed about what is being considered, to give them a chance to ask questions, to ask for them to express themselves on matters being considered, and to ask for their suggestions
- Public announcements, preferably made by the elders themselves
- The church bulletin
- Letters to members
- Copies of committee reports, treasurer’s reports, meeting minutes, etc.
- Special publications when a major program is being considered—for example, a flyer or brochure de-signed by the elders to give the details in a factual way
- Personal visits with the members, used as opportunities not only for the elders to get to know them better, but also for the members to ask questions

Effective communication brings enlightenment to the members on the growth of the church.

CONCLUSION

Jesus was a great leader, in part, because of His skills at communicating. He was recognized as a “*teacher come from God*” (***John 3:2; RSV***). Officers sent to seize Him returned saying, “*No man ever spoke like this man!*” (***John 7:46; RSV***). Are you doing your part to make effective communication the livewire of the church?

May we all with one another in the church, learn to treat people with godly respect, and learn to love as Christ desires, and to treat each other with kindness as we communicate with others in Jesus Christ Name!

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