**KEY FACTORS FOR CHURCH GROWTH OR STAGNATION   
OF TEN NEPALI ISAI MANDALI CHURCHES PILOT PROJECT**

**BY**

**LEKH NATH POUDEL**

**SINGAPORE BIBLE COLLEGE**

**JULY 2020**

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**2020**

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**POUDEL**

Singapore Bible College

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By

**Lekh Nath Poudel**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty in Partial Fulfillment

For the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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July 2020

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To all the pastors and leaders of Nepali Isai Mandali churches   
and professors of SBC.

**Abstract**

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As to the location of the abstract (2.1.4 in Turabian, 387), place it as the final item of the front matter just before the Contents.

For other details on writing the abstract, consult section 2.1.4 in Turabian, 387.

**Contents**

[Illustrations xiii](#_Toc138167430)

[Acknowledgements xv](#_Toc138167431)

[Abbreviations xvii](#_Toc138167432)

[Glossary xix](#_Toc138167433)

[Introduction 1](#_Toc138167434)

[Church History of Nepal 1](#_Toc138167435)

[Nepali Isai Mandali 3](#_Toc138167436)

[Problem Defined 5](#_Toc138167437)

[Research Question 5](#_Toc138167438)

[Hypothesis 6](#_Toc138167439)

[Research Method 6](#_Toc138167440)

[Scope and Limitations 7](#_Toc138167441)

[Definition of Terms 8](#_Toc138167442)

[Introduction to Literature 8](#_Toc138167443)

[Pilot Project 9](#_Toc138167444)

[Timeline 9](#_Toc138167445)

[Chapter 1 Pilot Project 11](#_Toc138167446)

[Methodology 11](#_Toc138167447)

[Key Findings 12](#_Toc138167448)

[Validation 14](#_Toc138167449)

[Chapter 2 Literature Review 15](#_Toc138167450)

[History and Background of Christianity in Nepal 15](#_Toc138167451)

[The First Missionary Attempts to Nepal 15](#_Toc138167452)

[Factors Contributing to the Failure of the First Mission Attempts in Nepal 19](#_Toc138167453)

[Mission Movement Among Nepalese in Diaspora in 1870-1950 19](#_Toc138167454)

[Gospel and Church Planting Movement in Modern Era 21](#_Toc138167455)

[The First Missionaries for Nepal in Modern Era 22](#_Toc138167456)

[Church Growth Movement in Nepal 23](#_Toc138167457)

[Pre-Democratic period 23](#_Toc138167458)

[Post-Democratic Period 24](#_Toc138167459)

[NIM Gyaneshwor Church and Its Growth 25](#_Toc138167460)

[Key Factors for Nepali Church Growth in the Modern Era 28](#_Toc138167461)

[Vision for the Unreached Nepalese People in Nepal 28](#_Toc138167462)

[Committed Leadership 28](#_Toc138167463)

[Active Laity in Evangelism 29](#_Toc138167464)

[Social Structure 30](#_Toc138167465)

[Healing and Miracle 30](#_Toc138167466)

[Church as a Source of Transformation 31](#_Toc138167467)

[Meaning and Definition of Church 31](#_Toc138167468)

[Importance of Local Church 32](#_Toc138167469)

[Key Function of the Church 32](#_Toc138167470)

[Church Health 33](#_Toc138167471)

[The key function of the Church 34](#_Toc138167472)

[Healthy Church Environment and Church Growth 35](#_Toc138167473)

[Marks of Healthy Church 36](#_Toc138167474)

[Church Growth 41](#_Toc138167475)

[Discovering Church Growth Principle 42](#_Toc138167476)

[Importance of Church Growth 43](#_Toc138167477)

[Types of Church Growth 44](#_Toc138167478)

[Key Factors for Church Growth 44](#_Toc138167479)

[Vision 45](#_Toc138167480)

[Prayer 46](#_Toc138167481)

[Power Evangelism 47](#_Toc138167482)

[Worship 47](#_Toc138167483)

[Preaching the Word of God 48](#_Toc138167484)

[Values 48](#_Toc138167485)

[Leadership Development 49](#_Toc138167486)

[Discipleship 51](#_Toc138167487)

[The Mission Mindset 56](#_Toc138167488)

[Challenges of Church Growth 57](#_Toc138167489)

[The Cycle of Growth and Decline of Local Churches 59](#_Toc138167490)

[Signs of Unhealthy Church 63](#_Toc138167491)

[Low Morale 63](#_Toc138167492)

[Downward Momentum 63](#_Toc138167493)

[Survival Mode 64](#_Toc138167494)

[Passive Attitudes 64](#_Toc138167495)

[Consolidated Power 65](#_Toc138167496)

[Lack of Vision 65](#_Toc138167497)

[Toleration of Known Sin 65](#_Toc138167498)

[Unproductive Ministries 66](#_Toc138167499)

[Church Revitalization 66](#_Toc138167500)

[Way to Revitalize the Stagnant Church 68](#_Toc138167501)

[Cultural Factors and Church Growth in the Nepalese Context 70](#_Toc138167502)

[Belief systems in Nepal 71](#_Toc138167503)

[Hindu Worldview and its Impact 74](#_Toc138167504)

[Christian Worldview 75](#_Toc138167505)

[Apologetics in Nepalese Context 77](#_Toc138167506)

[Role of Migration in the Church Growth Movement 81](#_Toc138167507)

[Migration and the World Christianity 84](#_Toc138167508)

[Scattered and Gather Nepalese People 85](#_Toc138167509)

[Heading 2 87](#_Toc138167510)

[Heading 3 87](#_Toc138167511)

[Heading 2 87](#_Toc138167512)

[Heading 2 88](#_Toc138167513)

[Chapter 4 Results and Recommendations 89](#_Toc138167514)

[Heading 2 89](#_Toc138167515)

[Heading 3 89](#_Toc138167516)

[Heading 2 90](#_Toc138167517)

[Heading 2 90](#_Toc138167518)

[Conclusion 91](#_Toc138167519)

[Heading 2 91](#_Toc138167520)

[Heading 3 91](#_Toc138167521)

[Appendix 1 Participant Information & Consent Form 93](#_Toc138167522)

[Appendix 2 Interviews with Senior Pastors/Lay Leaders 97](#_Toc138167523)

[Appendix 3 A Questionnaire for Believers 99](#_Toc138167524)

[Appendix 4 A Questionnaire for Lay Leaders 101](#_Toc138167525)

[Appendix 5 A Questionnaire for Senior Pastors 105](#_Toc138167526)

[Appendix 6 Findings of Pilot Pilot Project 111](#_Toc138167527)

[Findings from the Questionnaire 111](#_Toc138167528)

[Findings from the Interviews 116](#_Toc138167529)

[Key Factors of Church Growth need to emphasize 116](#_Toc138167530)

[The key factors that keep the church growth momentums 117](#_Toc138167531)

[The key factors to revive the church 117](#_Toc138167532)

[Main contributor person/s for church growth 118](#_Toc138167533)

[Main responsible person/s for church stagnancy. 118](#_Toc138167534)

[Key emphases need to embrace 118](#_Toc138167535)

[Bibliography 121](#_Toc138167536)

[Vita 127](#_Toc138167537)

# Illustrations

DO NOT DELETE THESE PARAGRAPHS EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT YET READY TO WRITE THIS SECTION! DO THE SAME WITH EACH SECTION OF THIS ENTIRE TEMPLATE.

**Figures**

Figure 1. A sample pie chart in sentence-style format 12

**Tables**

Table 1. Four columns 11

Table 2. Three columns contrasted in sentence-style format 12

Table 3. The ways people come to faith in Christ 20

Table 4. Duration of been a Christian believer 21

Table 5. Definition of discipleship 21

Table 6. Organized discipleship program in the church 21

Table 7. Attended discipleship programs in the church 22

Table 8. Regular leadership development programs in the church 22

Table 9. Proper training for the current ministry role 22

Table 10. Congregation members by age group 22

Table 11. Church congregation size including branch churches 23

Table 12. Key factors of church growth 24

Table 13. Key factors of church stagnancy 24

Table 14. Key emphases for church growth 25

Table 15. Bottleneck score 25

**How to Make the Above**

1. Tag each table entry in the dissertation with Insert > Caption > Options > Table so that Word will number it based on WS 2.9, 3.7, and Appendix 3B

2. Make this Illustrations page with Insert > Index and Tables > Table of Figures > Caption Label > Table

3. Label title **“Illustrations”** if both tables and figures are listed; otherwise, simply call it **“Tables”** or **“Figures”**

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# Acknowledgements

I am thankful to my family and church leaders for their support, making the writing of this dissertation possible. Thanks to all the pastors and leaders of the Nepali Isai Mandali churches. I am indebted to Pastor D.B. Lama, Pastor I.K. Rai, Pastor L.B. Bayalkoti, Pastor L.B. Rana, and Pastor T.B. Dharala.

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# Abbreviations

AGAPE Agape Fellowship Nepal

AOG Assemblies of God

CBS Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal

INF International Fellowship of Nepal

NASB New American Standard Version

NIM Nepali Isai Mandali Gyaneshwor Church

NIV New International Version

NLT New Living Translation

UMN United Mission to Nepal

# 

# Glossary

**alphabetize**. Do not put the terms in random order.

**capitalize**. Start the definition with a capital letter but not the item itself unless it normally is capitalized.

**description**. Follow each term with a brief definition that does not use the word being defined in the definition itself and be consistent by using either a single, full sentence or descriptive phrase, with either one ending in a period.

**font**. Use only the Times New Roman 12-point font.

**indentation**. Do not indent the first line of the definition but make sure the second line indents to distinguish the glossary items.

**single-spaced**. Each definition should be one line, but leave a blank line between each item.

**terms.** Distinguish each term by making it in **bold** and follow the term with a period. Then switch to regular text for the definition.

# Introduction

## Church History of Nepal

Nepal is a beautiful country. There are many ethnic groups, castes, and traditions. The government census taken in 2011 shows that the total population of Nepal is 81.4% Hindu, 9.0% Buddhist, 4.4% Muslim, 3.0% Kirati, and 1.4% Christian.[[1]](#footnote-1) Although the percentage of Christians seems small in comparison to other religions, the country is witnessing one of the fastest church growth movements in South Asia. There are only 70 years of modern church history in Nepal, but the growth is significant. One report says:

In recent years Christianity has become a popular religion in Nepal, particularly after democracy in 1990. The number of Christian Churches [*sic*] and the Christian population is increasing every year. The Christian populations [*sic*], who were [*sic*] not even reported in the 1952/54 Census, numbered only 458 in the 1961 Census and reached 101,976 in the 2001 Census. Between the 1991 and 2001 censuses, followers of Christianity increased more than 226%. The followers of the Christian religion have substantially increased in terms of number and percentage between the 2001 and 2011 census periods. The number of Christian religious followers has increased by 268.4% or a total of 273,723 populations [*sic*] during this period. While quoting an article of Subhas Sharma, Dhrubahari Adhikari (Kantipur, 20 July 2014) writes that there are 1,000 Churches [*sic*] (Girgaghar), 805,000 Christian religion followers and about 350 Christian mission offices, Bible colleges and Training Centres [*sic*] operating in Nepal.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The church growth in Nepal is significant; however, the history of Nepalese Christianity is not long. Father Joan Cabral of the Jesuit order was the first Christian recorded to have visited Kathmandu. He made this journey while returning to Kathmandu from Tibet via Shigatse.[[3]](#footnote-3) In 1715, two Roman Catholic fathers came to Nepal from Rome, but after a few years, they returned home.[[4]](#footnote-4) Some years later, more Catholic fathers came to Nepal from India, serving people by distributing medicine. During their ministerial period, 80–90 Newari people became Christians and established two churches in Kathmandu (one in Bhadgaun and the other in Thamel).[[5]](#footnote-5) In 1769, King Prithibi Narayan Shah, King of Gorkha, conquered Kathmandu. He did not allow Christians to remain in Kathmandu, so the believers left Nepal and settled in Betia, India.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The permanent establishment of churches in Nepal began in 1952. The first Nepali church, Ramghat Christian Church, was established on 17 November 1952.[[7]](#footnote-7) During that era, several churches started to take root in Nepal, including the Assemblies of God (AOG) Church, Nepalganj (1953), Putali Sadak Bethshalom Church, Kathmandu (1953), NIM Gyaneshwor Church, Kathmandu (1957), and Tansen Church, Palpa (1959).[[8]](#footnote-8) All of these churches were small, with only about 10–20 believers in attendance.[[9]](#footnote-9) There are three stages in the history of modern Nepalese Christianity. First, there was the Pre-democratic, or Panchayat Regime Period, from 1952–90. Next came the Democratic Period, from 1990–2006. Finally, there was the Democratic Republic, or Secularism Period, from 2006–the present. In the first period, the believers found it difficult to share the gospel, and churches were not growing in numbers. However, the believers were committed and devoted themselves to the Lord. In the second period, the churches grew significantly in number. Growth increased, but the churches did not prepare for this kind of unprecedented growth. Currently, in the third period, some churches are growing significantly, but others are stagnating.

## Nepali Isai Mandali

Nepali Isai Mandali Gyaneshwor was established in Kathmandu, Nepal, on a Sunday in August 1957. About 16 people attended the first service. The official name of the church was Nepali Isai Mandali Gyaneshwor Church.[[10]](#footnote-10) One of the pioneer churches in Nepal, Nepali Isai Mandali, Gyaneshwor Church (NIM), is known as one of the largest and most influential as well. NIM is known as a mission-oriented church. The leadership and members of the churches are vibrantly evangelistic. Most of the Nepali believers are quite enthusiastic about sharing the gospel with their families, relatives, and friends.

The statistics of Christianity’s growth in Nepal also mirror the growth of NIM churches. Some of the NIM churches are growing significantly in terms of size, passion for the Lord, and ministry. The growing churches demonstrate their effectiveness as they actively share the gospel, help the poor, and venture into unreached areas. Other churches are shrinking in size, passion, and ministry; it is challenging to detect enthusiasm or commitment in these stagnant churches.

There are four main churches—usually referred to as the NIM Central Churches—in Kathmandu Valley. These four central churches birthed 16 new daughter churches. More than 150 NIM branch-associated churches exist in Nepal. From its beginning, NIM has dedicated itself to mission work. The senior pastor and other leaders traveled to many parts of the country, sharing the gospel. However, after the people established democracy in Nepal in 1990, the NIM began planting its branch churches. Over the past 30 years, NIM has established more than 150 branch-associated churches. Out of these branch churches, some are growing significantly, but others are stagnating.

The researcher has worked as a mission coordinator of NIM churches for eleven years. During these years, he saw significant church growth. However, he also saw some stagnant and even declining churches. He did not know the specific factors behind church growth or stagnancy. The researcher found it intriguing that some churches grew significantly while others experienced little or no growth. NIM churches are still eager to plant churches in unreached areas of Nepal and even beyond, but this will only be possible when the local churches grow and are motivated to go to their neighboring towns and cities. To fulfill the Great Commission in Nepal, we must have a good knowledge and strategy about church growth. When local churches decline, they lose their effectiveness in the community, demonstrated by a lack of evangelism and church planting. The church must be alive and growing to fulfill the Great Commission. When we see success, we tend to appreciate local leadership, and we praise God. When we do not see the growth, we tend to blame local leaders and believers.

However, sometimes the factors contributing to church growth are varied and complex. Uncovering these factors will help leaders develop ministry strategies for church growth. A strategic plan will not only benefit NIM churches but other Nepali churches, which tend to regard NIM churches as role models. When local churches grow, it will be easier to plant other churches in the surrounding areas. NIM has a goal to plant at least one church in every village and town municipality in Nepal within the next 20 years. To accomplish this goal, it needs to discover the reasons behind growth and stagnancy. This study is not only essential for the growth of local churches, but it is also crucial for the researcher’s ministry role in NIM. To find out the solution to this problem, we will study the top five growing and top five stagnant NIM branch churches.

## Problem Defined

Church growth is a joyous thing. NIM, one of Nepal’s pioneer churches and one of its most influential churches, faces the problem of church stagnancy in some of its branch churches. Some of the NIM family of churches are growing significantly, but others are stagnating. We have yet to compile or do extensive or specific targeted research on this phenomenon, hence in this study, we propose to discover the critical factors for church growth or stagnation of ten NIM churches to maintain or revitalize church growth momentum.

## Research Question

To find out the answers to the proposed problem, we will ask the pastors of the top five growing and the top five stagnant NIM churches one fundamental question and a few supporting questions.

The primary question is this: What are the key contributing factors to church growth among the NIM churches that we need to emphasize to help churches thrive?

Supporting questions to answer the primary query above are these:

1. What are the key contributing factors to church growth?
2. What are the hindrances for church growth?
3. Who is/are the main contributor for church growth: key pastor or leader/lay leader/believers? Why?
4. Who is/are the responsible the church stagnancy: key pastor or leader/ lay leaders/ believers? Why?
5. What emphases does the church need to embrace to keep thriving?

## Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is that the reason behind the church growth or stagnancy in terms of its health and number depends upon the emphasis on discipleship and leadership development by the local church.

## Research Method

This dissertation presents an empirical study on the key contributing factors for church growth or stagnancy of ten NIM churches. The research project employs a mixture of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative. There will be interviews with ten pastors, a written survey of 100 lay leaders, and 200 church members. The same group will also receive an additional survey with a close-ended question. The data found on the field through interviews and questionnaires will be analyzed and presented under the research results section. The interviews and questionnaires will be in Nepali, which the researcher will translate into English. The researcher will go to the field for the interviews and the survey questionnaires; however, the researcher will conduct some interviews and questionnaires via telephone and the internet. The researcher will design the interviews and survey questionnaires to find out the key factors for church growth and stagnancy. After collecting all the data, we will analyze it with MS Excel 365. We will present findings in a variety of ways, including tables and various kinds of charts. We will also use some mathematical formulae to find the required results. Although the literature review on church growth is complete, the results are derived from first-hand findings in the field. The researcher will present the conclusions of the study in a compare-and-contrast form.

## Scope and Limitations

The objectives of this study are to find out the key factors for the growth or stagnancy of ten NIM churches. The results will be helpful for revitalization. They will also help growing churches understand what is useful to church growth. Thus, the growing churches can learn how to prevent church stagnancy, while the stagnant churches can focus on what will help their churches grow. Since NIM is one of the pioneers as the largest and most influential churches in Nepal and the Nepalese Christian community around the world, this study will be a useful tool for all Nepalese churches. Although there are many studies about discipleship, church planting, and church history, there is no study about church growth and stagnancy in Nepal. The researcher hopes that NIM churches will find the research essential for uncovering solutions to real problems. This project will be helpful for Nepali churches, missionaries, mission organizations, Bible school teachers, students, and pastors. Nearly everyone wants to see their church grow, and methods for church growth abound. This study can be helpful in the Nepalese and South Asian contexts. The findings of the study will aid those ministers working for church growth in Nepalese churches, both in Nepal and in South Asian culture. We will select ten churches for the research project. These ten churches, begun and established for at least 15 years, are the top five growing branch churches and the top five non-growing churches of the NIM. The top five growing churches are as follows:

1. Church G1 (1,600 average attendance including its branch churches)
2. Church G2 (1,200 average attendance including its branch churches)
3. Church G3 (750 average attendance including its branch churches)
4. Church G4 (1,000 average attendance including its branch churches)
5. Church G5 (900 average attendance including its branch churches)

The top five stagnant churches are as follows:

1. Church S1 (80 average attendance including its branch churches)
2. Church S2 (25 average attendance including its branch churches)
3. Church S3 (75 average attendance including its branch churches)
4. Church S4 (90 average attendance including its branch churches)
5. Church S5 (25 average attendance including its branch churches)

This study is limited to these ten churches out of 150 NIM branch churches. It will also not evaluate any other churches outside the NIM network.

## Definition of Terms

Church growth means it is the expansion of a church that is expanding both numerically and spiritually. When a church is not expanding in terms of membership or spiritual vitality, it is said to be in a state of church stagnation. Discipleship means it is a process to transform believers of Christ into disciples of Christ by teaching, leading, caring, and empowering. Leadership development is a process to equip and empower disciples of Christ to become the minister of Christ to build His church.

## Introduction to Literature

In this study, we will focus on church growth. However, many factors or variables affect church growth. We will study books, journals, and other authentic sources written about church growth. We will also review books, journals, theses, and other written materials about leadership, discipleship, missions, culture, and anthropology. Since the study focuses on the critical factors for church growth or stagnancy, we consult books and journals related to church growth, leadership, discipleship, mentoring, mission, church planting, church history, Nepalese society, culture, people groups, religion, and so forth.

## Pilot Project

To do a proper research study, we will conduct a pilot study on the topic of key factors for church growth or the stagnancy of four NIM churches. We will select the top two growing churches and the top two stagnant churches. In this pilot project, we will follow all the procedures which we expect in an actual dissertation but will do so in a concise and abbreviated form. In this pilot project, we will use close-ended survey questionnaires with four key pastors, 12 lay leaders, and 12 church members of four different growing and stagnant churches. We will also use open-ended question interviews with four key pastors and eight lay leaders from the same churches to find out the key factors for church growth or stagnancy. We will conduct the field survey and interviews over email or telephone, aiming to discover the key factors for church growth or stagnancy of these churches to both maintain church growth momentum and revitalize the local churches. We will complete this pilot study by July 2020.

## Timeline

The researcher will conduct a pilot study, which will inform how we can best carry out the research. We aim to complete our study by October 2023. The researcher plans to take a sabbatical from August 2022 to February 2024. The first chapter of the study will be complete by August 2022. The researcher will begin distributing the research and survey questionnaire in June 2022. We will collect all the data by December 2022.

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# Chapter 1 Pilot Project

The primary focus of the dissertation is NIM churches. NIM is one of the influential and large church groups in Nepal. It is one of the pioneer church groups in modern church history in Nepal. The study intends to find out the reason behind the church growth or stagnation in NIM churches in a specific period in a similar context. The methods are questionnaires with the senior pastor, key leaders, and believers, two growing churches, and two stagnant churches. In total, 28 people participated in filling out the questionnaire survey form, with four senior pastors, 12 lay leaders, and 12 believers of four growing and stagnant churches. Because of the time frame, there are eight interviews: four with the senior pastor of the church and four with lay leaders of growing and stagnant churches.

For the pilot project, the researcher selected two growing and two stagnant NIM branch churches. The two growing churches are as follows:

1. Church G1 (550 average attendance)
2. Church G2 (320 average attendance)

The two stagnant churches are as follows:

1. Church S1 (42 average attendance)
2. Church S2 (62 average attendance)

## Methodology

Over three weeks, I administered the instruments to 28 people. I sent the questionnaire to two senior pastors of growing churches and two senior pastors of stagnant churches. Similarly, I sent questionnaires to three lay leaders and three believers from each church. They filled in the form and sent it back via the internet. The research sample for the study is two growing churches and two stagnant churches. There is an interview with four pastors and four lay leaders of those churches with open-ended questions. The aim is to find out the real reason behind the growth and stagnancy. One questionnaire is for senior pastors, one for lay leaders, and one for church believers. Because of the time frame and travel restrictions, the researcher conducted interviews in Nepali via mobile phone and recorded them. Later the researcher transcribed the recordings in Nepali and then translated them into English. The Nepali questionnaires were sent to these four churches by email and messengers. The participants filled in all the questionnaires in Nepali. After receiving the completed Nepali questionnaire forms, the researcher translated them into English and entered the data into Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel for data coding and processing.

The questionnaire and interview process happened over 20 days, from July 1–20, 2020. The researcher sent all the questionnaires via the internet and collected them by the same medium. Interviews with the participants happened via telephone.

## Key Findings

In this pilot project, there were questionnaire responses from 28 people, including one senior leader, three lay leaders, and three lay believers from each church of two growing and two stagnant churches. According to the responses, 61% of 28 people came to faith either by their healing or their family members’ healing. Only 18% came to faith because of their family’s faith. The remaining 21% of people came to faith for various other reasons. Out of 28 people, 13 are believers for more than 15 years, 11 are more than six years, and only four are believers for less than five years. More than two-thirds of the people agreed that the definition of *discipleship* is the process of becoming more like Jesus.

The growing churches have a more organized discipleship program than the stagnant churches. Four out of seven people do not know if there is any such kind of training in stagnant churches. There are not sufficient discipleship programs in stagnant churches. The stagnant churches have less regular leadership development programs compared to the growing churches.

The stagnant churches have a higher percentage of adult believers. At the same time, growing churches have more younger people. There is a higher percentage of females than males in the churches except for Church G2. Growing churches are growing significantly, while stagnating churches are growing very slowly. All the churches started about 20 years ago or more. All the pastors, except for Church S1, are the original founding pastor of the church. The growing churches have increased in congregational size as well as in the number of branches, while the stagnant churches did not grow either in size or in branches. All the churches have similar geographical, demographical, and socio-political backgrounds.

The growing churches and stagnant churches have differences in growth because of the following reasons:

1. The growing churches have more organized discipleship programs than stagnant churches.
2. The growing churches have more leadership development programs than the stagnant churches.
3. The growing churches’ senior leadership have vision, commitment, and teamwork, while stagnant churches’ senior leadership lack these features.

The study shows that the stagnant churches need to have discipleship programs. Their main leaders need to be more visionary and committed. The senior leaders of stagnant churches need to develop other leaders in their churches. In the meantime, all the growing and stagnant churches need to focus upon prayer, sharing the gospel, discipleship, sound teaching and preaching, establishing a good testimony in the community, and leadership development.

## Validation

The pilot study obtained responses that can help answer the research questions. No changes need to be made to the instrumentation. The pilot study reveals the instrumentation is adequate, and the preliminary results are sufficient to answer the research question(s).

# Chapter 2 Literature Review

Throughout the history of Christianity, many things have been written and discussed on Church growth. However, it is unfortunate that there are only a few books written on church growth in the Nepalese context. Few other writers also have done significant work on discipleship. However, there are not enough study on the topic key factors of church growth and stagnation. Many reports and ground reality shows that Nepali church is one of the fastest-growing churches in the world. Many churches in Nepal are enjoying the growth. However, few churches in Nepal are struggling with growth. In this sense, it will be good to know why some churches in Nepal are growing so rapidly and some are struggling. This section will examine some works on church growth in various and different contexts and whether they can be applied in the Nepali context.

## History and Background of Christianity in Nepal

There are few significant works done about the history and background of Christianity in Nepal. Numerous researchers have contributed to the study of Nepal's church history, including Jonathan Lindell[[11]](#footnote-11), Cindy Perry[[12]](#footnote-12), Norma Kiegberg[[13]](#footnote-13), Rajendra Rongong[[14]](#footnote-14), Dil Bahadur Lama[[15]](#footnote-15), Simon Pandey[[16]](#footnote-16), Manoj Shrestha[[17]](#footnote-17), and Luciano Petek.[[18]](#footnote-18)

### The First Missionary Attempts to Nepal

An Italian editor, Luciano Petek, has collected and documented significant and historical documents in his book called Italian Missionaries in Tibet and Nepal. Royal Nepal Academy (Rajkiya Pragya Prathistahan) translated it into the Nepalese language. He collected the letters of Roman Capuchin Fathers and presented them comprehensively and chronologically.

According to Petek, the first known evangelical group was led by Jesuit Antonio Monserate headed to Mansarovar region Tibet in 1580-83, and he was presented before Mugal King Akbar before entering Tibet."[[19]](#footnote-19) The campaign to quest Nepal and Tibet by European began with the Catholic Evangelists in the 17th Century.[[20]](#footnote-20) The Portuguese Father Joao Kabral was the first European missionary to enter Nepal when he was returning to Bengal from Shigatse, Tibet in 1628.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The first missionary assigned to Nepal was Father Anriko Roth in 1667, however, it is unknown whether he could enter Nepal or not because he died on 20th June 1668.[[22]](#footnote-22) An Armenian came to Nepal to establish the mission and preach the Gospel in 1679.[[23]](#footnote-23) He stayed for a few weeks but because of loneliness, he return to Patna, India in 1680 without having any achievements.[[24]](#footnote-24) After that, the mission to Nepal halted for a long time and regional mission organizations in India have shown less interest in Nepal[[25]](#footnote-25)

According to Petek, Capuchin Father Della Penna reestablished Nepal Mission in January 1715, and Father Jesheppe Feliche Da Morro and Jobhanni Frachesko Da Fosombroone helped him in the mission.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, Father Della went for Tibet Mission and the other two missionaries stayed in Kathmandu.[[27]](#footnote-27) Because these two brothers were skilled in the medical profession and their ability to treat patients opened the door for the Gospel, King Jagajjay Malla had provided them with housing.[[28]](#footnote-28) During that period other missionaries also came to Nepal because of the difficulties in Tibet.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Another significant work has been done by Cindy Perry in her book *A Biographical History of the Church in Nepal*. Perry also confirms these facts and gives brief details about how it was then. She writes,

The Capuchins were back in the Valley of Nepal with hitherto unknown freedom to live and share them faith. During the next few years ten more adults were brought into the Church in Kathmandu, and in Bhadgaon 30 persons "in danger of death" were baptized. ... Small Christian community of local believers slowly growing in both Kathmandu and Bhadgaon... Then in 1744 the Capuchin Fathers had an invitation to extend their ministry in to Patan.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Perry goes on to describe the scenario of that brief golden era in the following manner:

According to Perry, at that era the ordinary people were more receptive to the Gospel than the Brahmins and nobles, yet conversion was rare because of fear of being outcasted or losing jobs.[[31]](#footnote-32) They were few, mostly ordinary people, and many were Newar landless farmers.[[32]](#footnote-33) Some of them were converted in Tibet, who traditionally migrated for trade or jobs.[[33]](#footnote-34)

In his book *Nepal and the Gospel* of God, Jonathan Lindell, a missionary to Nepal in the early 1900s, writes:

So, His Majesty welcomed them in a friendly way, gave them permission to live in his realm and to go about their activities, and gave them a rent-free house to live in. ...Across the span of 50 to 60 years, during this 18th century, the Capuchins Order sent some 20 expeditions of missionaries to this mission.[[34]](#footnote-44)

Over the span of the 54 years of the active works of the Mission in the Nepal Valley, 29 Capuchin missionaries lived there (1715-1769).[[35]](#footnote-45) Nepalese treated them in two ways: a mixture of friendliness with generosity on the one hand and suspicion and animosity on the other.[[36]](#footnote-46)

These works show that despite of few minor obstacles, there were great opportunities to share the gospel and expand the church. However, as in the history of Christianity, the season was not always favorable. Social persecutions were also occurring in the meantime. In the Kathmandu valley, the Brahmins were intimidating, threatening, harassing, and encouraging family and friends to do the same to these converted Christians.[[37]](#footnote-47) "They suffered for their faith, out-caste, reviled by family and friends. Some left their faith but most endured and held true."[[38]](#footnote-48)

Another significant act of persecution was about to take place while the church was experiencing various forms of persecution. In 1768 the Gurkha King Prithivi Narayan Shah invaded Kathmandu valley. He disregarded missionaries and the believers in Katmandu valley.[[39]](#footnote-49) King allowed them to leave the country and Nepalese believers left their country because of their faith and went to Betiya India on February 4, 1769.[[40]](#footnote-50) Rongong says, "Nepal was closed to Christians for almost 200 years."[[41]](#footnote-52) There was no church in Nepal from the time a Christian group left in 1769 till the founding of Ramghat Church in Pokhara in 1952.[[42]](#footnote-53)

It took a long time to enter the Gospel in Nepal. The Gospel entered to India, the neighboring countries, in first century. However, the first recorded Christian missionary enter to Nepal was Father Joao Kabral.[[43]](#footnote-54) He entered Nepal in 1628.[[44]](#footnote-55) Only a small number of people followed Christ in the first 150 years, from 1628 to 1769. There were couple of churches in that period. The church could not flourish as it should be. These studies demonstrate that there was a lack of resources in the ministry, including insufficient missionaries, funding, and mission agency support. Meanwhile, there were persecutions. High caste and noble people in Nepal were concerned about the threat that Christianity would represent to their religious institutions.[[45]](#footnote-56) Perry says, "They were the ones who urged, through intimidation and threat, the relatives of the new converts either to reclaim them or to ostracize them from their society."[[46]](#footnote-57)

It shows that there were two main factors behind the failure of first missionary movement: 1) *Lack of lack of vision and incompetency of Capuchin's leadership,* and 2) *Persecutions*. One of the reason people cannot endure in persecution is lack of discipleship.

True disciples always follow Jesus until the death. Jesus Himself was the example for the church. He says, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (Joh 15:19 ESV). Paul says, "that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know." (1Th 3:3-4 ESV). Paul rightly discipled the church in Thessalonica so he could say that he told them earlier about the persecution. When first band of these believers in Nepal left the country and went to India, it shows that they were not ready for enduring in the persecutions. It was due to the poor discipleship provided by the Capuchin leaders of that era in South Asia. Although, there were real difficulties for Capuchin leaders as Jonathan Lindell states in his book *Nepal and the Gospel of God*. Lindell says, "The Capuchins were double foreigners, strangers, suspects. They were not from some kingdom or people of Asia but from away oversees."[[47]](#footnote-58) However, it could not hinder them from advancing the God's work. Jesus has already said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mat 28:19-20 ESV)

A dark period time for Gospel in Nepal (1769-1951)

After the death of King Prithivi Narayan Shah his son King Singh Pratap invited missionaries to Nepal, however, there were no missionaries to send to Kathmandu, Kaski, and Palpa.[[48]](#footnote-59) When King Singh Pratam Shah died his son came to power. He had a good relationship with the missionaries because they gave good treatment while he was sick in Betiya.[[49]](#footnote-60) Father Jusheppe Da San Marchello came to Nepal 1787 followed by Father Karlo Maria Da Aalatri.[[50]](#footnote-61) They left Nepal after two years since they relocated to Banaras, India, for their new assignment.[[51]](#footnote-62) As a result, the Capuchins terminated their mission to Nepal because they could not send a missionary there.[[52]](#footnote-63) After that while there was no Christian activities and the country was suffering with political power struggles. Lindell says, "The leading families and followers went through a generation or two of ingrown frustration conflict and jockeying for position and power."[[53]](#footnote-64) After that, Jung Bahadur Rana became Prime Minister of Nepal, establishing the Rana Regime (1846-1951), a 105-year period during which the 'Rana' family governed the country through the office of the Prime Minister.[[54]](#footnote-65) It was the dark period of Nepal.[[55]](#footnote-66) Lindell rightly says, "During this century the lamps of life gradually burned low and dim over the mountains and valley of Nepal."[[56]](#footnote-67) Regarding the duration of this dark period, Lindell continues, "Religious and civil laws were intertwined. Nepal was an orthodox Hindu state, the last stronghold of unadulterated Hinduism in the sub-continent."[[57]](#footnote-68) Rongong concludes, " For approximately 200 years Nepal remained 'untouched'. Nothing seems to have happened within the country."[[58]](#footnote-69) During 1769-1951, Christian activities were completely stopped since Christians, foreign and national, and Christian literature, were forbidden.[[59]](#footnote-70)

Christian activities were absent for about 200 years. For the Christian activity in Nepal to cease at that time, there were primarily two reasons: 1) Lack of missionary, and 2) Legal obstacle. After the death of King Prithivi Narayan Shah, his son and grandson wanted missionaries to come in Nepal as medical missionaries.[[60]](#footnote-71) However, the leadership of Capuchins were stiff to send genuine missionaries in Nepal.[[61]](#footnote-72) During Rana Regime, Nepal has a good relationship with the British government.[[62]](#footnote-73) However, there were no missionary efforts made by any British missionaries to enter Nepal.

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### Mission Movement Among Nepalese in Diaspora in 1870-1950

Meantime, outside of the nation, the Gospel's activity was growing among the Nepalese diasporas. Few people started to receive the Christ. Perry says, "Bhim Dal Dewan along with Chandra Leela are one of the first Nepali Christians of modern era, came to the Lord in Darjelling."[[63]](#footnote-78) Bhim Dal Dewan got baptized in 1874.[[64]](#footnote-79) "The real beginning of the Nepali church in Darjelling came through the pioneer efforts of Rev. William Macfarlane, Church of Scotland missionary"[[65]](#footnote-80) Despite different kinds of struggles the church grew among Nepalese in Darjelling.[[66]](#footnote-81) Perry claims,

Five years after first baptism, 1880 there were 130 Christians (Nepali and Lepcha). By 1900 there were over 2500 and by 1945 almost 14000...Not only did the Nepali church in Darjeeling grow in spite of oppositions, but it wasn't before the Gospel began to spill over back into Nepal... During the next 75 years before Nepal was open for the Gospel to be openly proclaimed, thousands did hear the message through the efforts of the Nepali church in Darjeeling-by-evangelistic preaching on bazaar days and at the borders, by Christian literature and Scripture portions, and by occasional courageous forays into Nepal.[[67]](#footnote-82)

Lindell says, "these Nepali Christians had a deep and genuine concern that others of their people might know of God's saving love and experience his salvation. This concern reached out toward Nepal, and they prayed for that land."[[68]](#footnote-83)According to Lindell out of their prayers they used sing various prayer songs. Among them one of the songs is as follows:

O Lord, hear our petition, open the door of salvation

For the Gorkhalies[Nepali]

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, hear our petitions,

Show us the way by a cloudy fiery pillar.

Peoples of different religions are to the east, west, and south;

Tibet is north, and Nepal our home in the middle.

There are cities: Thapathali, Bhatgaou, Patan, Kathmandu:

Our desire is to make them your devotees.

Up, brothers: we must go, ignoring hate and shame,

Leaving wealth, people, comfort, to do the holy task.[[69]](#footnote-84)

There is another hymn that was also used to sing,

Having a vision of the Lord, a vision of Jesus let us do the ministry.

Nepal is crying 'Save us, save us!'; Souls are dying! Souls are dying!

See, thousands are dying in the lake of sin."

Lord sacrificed His life on the cross for the whole world.

See the love, See the love, for Nepal in His heart!

Wake up and rise oh youths, do now the ministry!

In the Lord's service for the rest of your life.

Came fast to save the souls of Jesus,

Harvest is full, Harvest is full, gather it in Jesus' Treasury."[[70]](#footnote-85)

These two hymns tell us the history of vision for Nepal in the heart of the Nepalese Christian community in North-East India. Lindell says, "This kind of concern and prayer led these Nepalese to organize a Gorkha Mission of their own (1892).[[71]](#footnote-86) Many Christian believers from North-East Indian regions like Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim felt a call to come to Nepal. Meanwhile, mission organizations were working near Nepalese border towns planned to enter the country.[[72]](#footnote-87)

These studies shows that Nepalese in diaspora had vision and prayer for Nepalese people in Nepal. They prepared to come Nepal and waited border area until the favorable time arrived.[[73]](#footnote-88)

### Gospel and Church Planting Movement in Modern Era (1951-1990)

After the dark period of two centuries in 1951, an autocratic family-based Rana Regime had gone, and democratic system had established. According to Karthak, "Prior to 1951, before we enter into Nepal, all the Christian organizations had been working for Nepal from their respective bases in bordering Indian towns like Jogbani, Nautuna, Rupaidia moved into Nepalgunj, Pokhara, and other parts of Nepal."[[74]](#footnote-91) After much effort, the gospel eventually made its way back into Nepal. There were about 25 mission agencies and groups active in the border.[[75]](#footnote-93) One of them was Nepal Evangelistic Band (later International Nepal Fellowship).[[76]](#footnote-94) In the initiation of NEB (later INF), Ramghat Church Pokhara, led by its senior Nepali pastor David Mukhia, was the first church to be founded in Nepal.[[77]](#footnote-95) According to perry, churches started to emerge virtually simultaneously in Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Nepalgunj throughout the 1950s, which served as three major hubs for church growth.[[78]](#footnote-96)

### The First Missionaries for Nepal in Modern Era (1951-1990)

According to Rongong, a mother in Mar Thoma Church, Kerala heard the message and as a result, dedicated her newborn son to God's service in Nepal.[[79]](#footnote-100) The Lord worked in his heart and he took the calling personally.[[80]](#footnote-101) While he was studying in the seminary he interested three other Mar Thoma students in going on this mission.[[81]](#footnote-102) He and one of his friends arrived in Nepal as pioneers of the Gospel for Nepal.[[82]](#footnote-103) Later returning home they reported to church, friends, and the seminary.[[83]](#footnote-104) This time forming a voluntary band named 'Christa Shanti Sangh' four young men from Mar Thoma Church traveled again to Nepal in 1953.[[84]](#footnote-105) In 1954, these four men started a small fellowship at Juddha Sadak later this fellowship become Putalisadak Church, the first church in Kathmandu Valley.[[85]](#footnote-106)

Perry states, "Several young people recruited by Elizabeth Franklin in Kalimpong to go to Nepal as Christian workers. Daftan Sada and Prakash Rai were the first young people to go to join the newly formed United Christian Mission to Nepal (later United Mission to Nepal, UMN) in Nepal, as laboratory technician trainees for a hospital in 1955."[[86]](#footnote-107) As missionaries, Robert Karthak, Rajendra, and Jemit Rongong with their daughter Sharon, Dhanmaya Khwas and her young siblings, and Danial Sitling from Kalimpong traveled to Bhaktapur, Nepal with Miss Franklin in the ensuing years.[[87]](#footnote-108) Some others followed them, some looking for jobs in the medical or educational sectors while others worked full-time as Christians. Some of these individuals went on to become significant leaders in Nepal's growing church.[[88]](#footnote-109)

## Church Growth Movement in Nepal

### Modern Era (1951-1990)

Norma Kehrberg gives the findings of detailed research in her book called *The Cross in the Land of the Khukuri.* Kehrberg states, "The rapid growth of the church of the New Testament is reflected in the growth of a similar type of church, the church in Nepal. In 1951, there were no known believers; by the end of 1969 the church is estimated to have 4,000 members."[[89]](#footnote-110) The Christian community estimated there were 50,000 Christians at the end of the Panchayat system of governance in 1990, however, the government census reported 31,280.[[90]](#footnote-111) "The earliest recording states that there were 30 churches in 1970, and increase to 40 by 1977 and up to 60 in 1980. After 1980, during a time of increased persecution from the authorities, the number of Christian converts increased markedly. In 1992, there were 160 churches."[[91]](#footnote-112)

### Later Era (1990-2023)

According to Kehrberg, there was a noticeable rise in Christians following the advent of democracy.[[92]](#footnote-113) "The number of believers increased from 50,000 in 1990 to 75,000 in 1992, 300,000 in 1998, and 400,000 in 1999.[[93]](#footnote-114) " According to those benchmark numbers, the increase in the growth of the church in Nepal in 50 years parallels the growth of the New Testament Church at 40% until reaching the fourteenth year in 1980. The overall growth rate of the church in Nepal is estimated to be about 35% per year."[[94]](#footnote-115) According to The National Christian Community Survey (NCCS) conducted in 2022, the number of Christians and churches in Nepal is a total of 683,261 Christians and 7,758 churches in the country.[[95]](#footnote-116) According to the National Census of Nepal (2021), the male Christian population is 512,313, which is 1.76% of the total population.

The above statistics show that churches in Nepal are growing fast. To keep growth in a healthier way churches in Nepal need to consider some important factors. According to Kehrberg, the main challenges for growing Nepalese churches is to provide *leadership* and to help in the *discipleship* of new believers.[[96]](#footnote-117)

### Histroy and Background of NIM Gyaneshwor Church

Pastor Robert Karthak was born in Kalimpong, India in 1926, received Christ at 21 years of age had got vision and calling to come to Nepal while reading the scripture from John 10:16. Pastor Robert came to Nepal in 1954 and stayed a year in Kathmandu valley. Finally, in 1957, Pastor Robert came to Nepal along with other ten missionaries. They started the NIM Gyaneshwor Church. Rongong says, "The first 'official' church service was held at a rented house in Dilli Bazaar, Kathmandu on a Sunday in August 1957. Robert Karthak was accepted as the pastor of the church and 16 people attended the first service. The official name of the church was Nepali Isai Mandali, and later, when it moved to its own building at Gyaneshwor, it became Nepali Isai Mandali (NIM), Gyaneshwor Church."[[97]](#footnote-120)

In 1958 Pastor Robert Karthak went to the United Kingdom to study for a year. In 1969 Pastor Rajendra Rongong gave baptism to Mr. Shivkumar Thapa as the first baptism of the Church on the Dhobikhola River.[[98]](#footnote-121) Bhuvan writes, "In the first decade, the growth was very slow. Only a few people started to come as newcomers. However, the numbers were growing little by little."[[99]](#footnote-122)

The government was not friendly toward the church when the Panchayati system was introduced in 1960 in place of the democratic system, but the church remained steadfast in the Word of God.[[100]](#footnote-123) Robert says in his testimony,

Since the Party-less Panchayat System was introduced in the country, Nepalese churches faced many persecutions and difficulties. Several believers were thrown behind bars, chased out of their villages and homes, manhandled, and tortured. They tried to reconvert Christians to their original religion. They were forbidden to meet for fellowship; churches were pulled down, and burnt ... Many were even barred from getting employment, education, and jobs for their faith.[[101]](#footnote-124)

Despite persecution, the churches in Nepal were growing.

In the 1970s, as the church progressively grew, it formed Bible study groups in Sanepa, Bungmati, and Khokana.[[102]](#footnote-126) Even though persecutions were occurring throughout Nepal, the church began to expand in the 1980s. Since, people began to arrive at the church from Patan, Sanepa, and various areas of Lalitpur, the church started new fellowships in Mangalbazar and Sanepa.[[103]](#footnote-127) Later, the Mangalbazar fellowship changed its name to the Koinonia Church Patan, under the pastoral leadership of Mangalman Maharjan.[[104]](#footnote-128) Bhuvan writes, "In the 1970s and 80s the charismatic movement has been started. The church started to grow. The building was narrow to accommodate new believers."[[105]](#footnote-129) Pastor Robert says, "Even during persecution, the church continued to grow. This all happened because of the help of the Holy Spirit. It was Him who helped to establish the church, proclaim the gospel and build believers up."[[106]](#footnote-130)

The Church grew so rapidly as a result that the church hired new full-time ministry workers.[[107]](#footnote-131) The church launched cell groups in 1973 under the name "Gharelu Sangati," although previously it was known as the bible study and prayer group.[[108]](#footnote-132) Later these house fellowships became vital places to make disciples and multiply.

The NIM Gyaneshwor Church started establishing churches in Tikapur, Solukhumbu, and Makwanpur between the years 1985 and 1990.[[109]](#footnote-133) Pastor Robert and his team traveled to many places in the country to preach the Gospel. Robert says, "God, in His grace, has grated me to travel across different districts of Nepal for ministry. The longest missionary journey I took out on foot was for 15 days ... 8 days to go and 7 days to return."[[110]](#footnote-134)

Following Nepal's political system transition and the emergence of a democratic society in the 1990s, the church began to expand more quickly. However, in 1960 when Panchayati System was introduced in the place of democratic system. church suffered. The suffering and persecution did not hinder the church growth.

The Gospel's work grew incredibly quickly in 1990 after a democratic government took the place of the party-free Panchayati system, which had been in operation for 30 years.[[111]](#footnote-136) In 1990, a new constitution granted religious freedom.[[112]](#footnote-137) Due to freedom, a large number of hidden disciples and other new converts began attending church, and the church quickly expanded.[[113]](#footnote-138) NIM Gyaneshwor church began gathering at four locations in the Kathmandu Valley towards the end of 1993: Gyaneshwor, Jorpati, Sanepa, and Bhanimandal.[[114]](#footnote-139)

## Key Factors for Church Growth in Nepal (After 1951)

### Vision for the Unreached Nepalese People in Nepal

After the 200 years of darkness once again the door for the Gospel in Nepal has reopened in 1951. The workers of the Gospel ministry immediately entered into Nepal when Nepal opened its door for mission organizations and missionaries. They were prepared to enter in Nepal. More than 100 years of prayer and vision for the unreached people in Nepal made them passionate to take initiative to enter Nepal. Their songs tells that they had a vision for the Nepalese people in Nepal. They saw that the people in Nepal needed salvation. They saw that people were in darkness without having any hope of light. As believers of Christ, these missionaries had already experienced the new life in Christ. They wanted to have same experience in Nepalese people, as their song says,

Having a vision of the Lord, a vision of Jesus let us do the ministry.

Nepal is crying 'Save us, save us!'; Souls are dying! Souls are dying!

See, thousands are dying in the lake of sin."

... Wake up and rise oh youths, do now the ministry!

In the Lord's service for the rest of your life.

Came fast to save the souls of Jesus,

Harvest is full, Harvest is full, gather it in Jesus' Treasury.[[115]](#footnote-140)

When the pioneer leaders had the vision of lost people in Nepal, they served the Lord without any hesitation or difficulties. That vision passed to the next generation, and it is still at work in the Nepalese community. Nepalese were/are in the bondage of religion, poverty, diseases, demonic attacks, and other different socio-economic problems. The leaders and missionaries saw the need of the society and the main and root problem was that they did not know the One and only true God. So, Bill Hybels in his book, *Courageous Leadership* states,

Vision is at the very core part of leadership. Take vision away from a leader and you cut out his or her heart. Vision is the fuel that the leader runs on. It's the energy that creates action. It's the fire that ignites the passion of followers. It's a clear call that sustains focused effort year after year, decade after decade, as people offer consistent and sacrificial service to God."[[116]](#footnote-142)

The vision for the Nepalese people has a big role in reestablishment of ministry of the Gospel once again. There were difficult times, but they continued the ministry. They did not forsake and went back but endured in the hardship. From 1951-2023(now), there were many persecutions and hardships for Christians in Nepal. However, because of the vision, the Christians in Nepal have been enduring and growing every year.

### Committed Leadership

Without called and passionate leadership, the church cannot sustain and grow. The calling put a leader into the service and the passion sustains them in the leadership. God always uses people to lead the people. God called Patriarchs, prophets, kings, and other laypeople to lead people in His path. Though the role of leadership is quite challenging. It needs a lot of commitment and endurance in hardship. The role of committed leaders is vital in the ministry. McIntosh rightly asserts, "To a great extent, a fruitful ministry hinges on the heart of the pastor. If a church is to capture the heart of its community, Christ must first capture the heart of the pastor."[[117]](#footnote-144) Similarly, first-generation leadership has played a vital role in the church growth of Nepal.

Soon after the entering gospel, the Panchayat Regime, propounded by King Mahendra Shah established in Nepal in 1961. It was a 30-year-long system in Nepal. It was a period of persecution for the churches and Christian believers and leaders.[[118]](#footnote-145) During that period Christianity was targeted and made a state enemy.[[119]](#footnote-146) They suffered for the Gospel, but they did not leave the ministry of the Gospel. Rongong says, "But this persecution turned out to be a boon for the Nepali churches ... Places of persecution and jail became the mission field. Many were converted in jail."[[120]](#footnote-147)

### Active Laity in Evangelism

When the gospel reentered in Nepal in 1951, missionaries and lay leaders were active. Similarly new believers were also excited to share the Gospel to their family, friends, and neighbors. Rongong, a founder of the NIM Gyaneshwor Church, asserts:

Most of the church members actively participate in evangelizing. Usually, they share their testimonies with their own family members and/or friends ... Transformation in personal life after becoming a Christian; healing from sickness after being prayed for, are often the reasons people come to believe.[[121]](#footnote-148)

Rongong further says, "Almost all the churches have similar beginnings which follow a similar pattern."[[122]](#footnote-149) Regarding the church planting movement in Nepal, Rongong says,

People in the villages hear the Gospel either from their relatives or a preacher assigned by the churches. Some of them believe and accept. A nucleus of believers begins meetings in someone's residence for fellowship. As the number of believers grows they establish a church. In some cases leaders from nearby districts or villages assist them in the establishment of the church ... Usually, the priority of the church is to own its own building. Since that takes time, services are held in rented rooms or rooms loaned by church members.[[123]](#footnote-150)

These observations show that there has been a big role of active lay believers. Strong *leadership* encourages believers to take initiative, and effective *discipleship* equips them to serve as authentic witnesses.

### Social Structure

In his book, *Social Structure and Church Planting*, Apeh rightly says, "The significance of social structure can be seen in the Word of God. Some examples and cases in the New Testament show the importance of social structure of the church planting process of the early church."[[124]](#footnote-151) He provides a few biblical examples, which are as follows:

First of all, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit recognized the importance of using languages indigenous to the listeners present...

Secondly, when there was a conflict arising out of the neglect of the Grecian Jewish widows (Acts 6: 1-4) in the daily distribution of food, the Apostles recognized that socio-economic problems were significant elements in their ministry...

Thirdly, the Apostles referred to early Hebrew history in their addresses. Peter used this method in Acts 2: 1-36 by his reference to the prophets and Psalms...

Fourth, and finally, the Apostle Paul used social context factors of his audience, receptors, and companions to promote understanding, interpersonal relationships, and effective ministry in proclaiming Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, he became all things to all men for the sake of leading them to Christ (I Cor. 9:22).[[125]](#footnote-152)

When missionaries came to Nepal after 1951, they bring Nepalese Christian leaders from diasporas with them. These Nepalese Christian leaders maintained the norms and values of Nepalese people. They never compromised with the message, but they changed the methods. They created the hymns in Nepali lyrics and music. Nepalese ethnics people saw that the Christians are not different than them. Dahal says,

In total, 11 major ethnic/caste groups comprise 79.4% of the total Christian religion followers in Nepal. Among them the number of Christian religion followers has substantially increased in Chepang, Tamang, Magar, Sarki, and Kami between the 2001 and 2011 censuses."[[126]](#footnote-155)

These facts are supported by Rongong, who claims:

The tribal culture in many cases has often been the reason for becoming a Christian. If someone becomes a Christian in any tribe, he/she is often persecuted to begin with. But their consistent witnessing, especially in their personal lives, usually wins over one or more senior members of their family. After that it is only a matter of time before the rest of family becomes Christians.[[127]](#footnote-156)

Regarding the social system in Nepal, Dahal claims,

As most of the Nepali people live in rural areas, it is natural that there are more people following a particular type of religion in rural areas. But it also gives a strong message that rural people could be motivated more easily to change their religion if external factors play a role in following their religious faiths/values.[[128]](#footnote-157)

These studies show the importance of social structure to expand the Kingdom of God. It also shows that in the Nepalese tribal social structure the leader/s of the family and society has huge impact on their society. The culture and structure of the society contributes to church growth.

### The Phenomena of Healing and Miracle

The Bible has many examples of healing and miracles. In Old Testament God did miracles works by Himself and through His people. Similarly, when Jesus was on the earth, he performed many healings and miracles. In early churches, God did the healings and miracles through the apostles and church. The Bible demonstrates that God, not healing or miracles, is the only true answer. However, God in His sovereignty uses healing and miracles to demonstrate His love towards human beings. Nepalese people have been in different kind of bondages for a long period of time. There were insufficient health care systems about 70 years ago in Nepal. A large portion of the Nepalese population relied on witchcraft and witchdoctors as a form of healthcare. Many Nepalese people participated in cult practices in order to achieve this. Instead of providing a solution, these methods put them in a worse condition. They were looking for a ray of hope to overcome their fate. When the Gospel arrived in the nation and people had the opportunity to hear the Word of God, they discovered hope. They started to believe in the Word of God. To those helpless Nepalese people, God, in His compassion, poured out miracles and healing. As a result many people have been coming to Christ. Rongong claims,

A very important factor in attracting people to Christianity was the physical healing of people. Often people with some kind of sickness went to church for healing, because they had heard that Jesus heals sick people. In many cases people were miraculously healed, when prayed for. They believed and became Christian.[[129]](#footnote-159)

According to Rongong, signs like healing and miracles occurred in churches all over, which emboldened and strengthened the Christians in their faith.[[130]](#footnote-160)

Tamang in his book called 'Khristian Mandali Itihas' also confirm this fact, and says, "Especially, Nepalese are coming to the Lord because of healing. In pain, sickness, and difficult situations, people seek to know the Lord. 40-60% of believers came to Christ because of healing." [[131]](#footnote-161)

It shows that many Nepalese become believer when they themself or their friends, family and relatives get healed from various diseases. When they experienced and saw the healings and miracles, they started to share the truth with their family, friends, and relatives. Hence, many people came to Christ and the church started to grow.

### Discipleship through cell groups

In Nepalese churches, the house fellowships have significant role in the church growth. House fellowships meet during the week in almost every church in Nepal. A recent survey shows that 91.25 percentage of believers attend the house fellowship.[[132]](#footnote-163) In Nepal, the most common type of cell group is a house fellowship. Defining house fellowship Tamang says,

House fellowship is a gathering of believers in a believer’s house based on the convenience of the believers in a given village. The meeting can take place anytime during the week, normally in the evening after the people get back from their work in the field. A believer can request the church to set up a house fellowship in his house, or the church itself sets it up in various villages on certain days. [[133]](#footnote-164)

House fellowship is one of the vital platforms for nurturing believers' faith.[[134]](#footnote-165) The new convert can acquire discipleship from their leader because there is always a leader to lead the small group known as "house fellowship". When people gather in house fellowship, they get opportunities to learn and share from each other. Tamang asserts,

Since it is a house fellowship, it does not take place in the church, but a believer’s house. A house by house turn can be set up by the church so that every Christian family can host the fellowship. While it will be difficult for believers to house a fellowship in their house if others in the family are not Christians courageous believers in the house may set up one. The fellowship then serves as an evangelistic platform for the unbelieving family members.[[135]](#footnote-166)

The house fellowship is one of the key factors for church growth in Nepal. Emphasizing the role of the house fellowship in Nepal for starting and growing churches, Rongong states,

People in the villages hear the Gospel either from their relatives or a preacher assigned by the churches. Some of them believe and accept. A nucleus of believers begins meetings in someone's residence for fellowship. As the number of believers grows they establish a church. In some cases leaders from nearby districts or village assists them in the establishment of the church ... Usually the priority of the church is to own its own building. Since that takes time, services are held in rented rooms or rooms loaned by church members.[[136]](#footnote-167)

### Transformations in Nepalese Christians' Lives

The church is a medium to transfer the community. God loves all people and wants to bring them into His family. The Church is the visible form of God's family. The Church is the place where people can feel that they are loved by God the creator of heaven and the earth. The church is the place where people can feel the presence and love of God. People will hear the Gospel and some of them will be saved. God's family will be increased.

Nepal has been known as one of the poorest countries in the world. Nepal has many natural resources, but it is not utilized because of people's behavior and lifestyle. There has been social, and family problems in society. When a church was/is established in a particular location, though, people begin to recognize and experience the Gospel's transformative power. Only Gospel can change people's mindset. Ott and Wilson confirm it by saying,

As kingdom communities are planted, societies will be positively affected. Church growth experts have long observed that “social lift” occurs as people become Christians: as people from the poor and lower classes become Christians, and as they adopt biblical lifestyles, they rise in social standing and standard of living. For example, fathers take more responsibility for their families, with the result that money is spent on education instead of alcohol or gambling. A work ethic is adopted, and human dignity is instilled in place of despair and inferiority.[[137]](#footnote-168)

The church in Nepal has a positive impact on society. Because of good testimonies of newly converted believers the church started to grow. Rongong rightly says, "In many cases unexpected radical transformation in the life of an individual after becoming a Christian functioned as a challenge and a motivation to know more about Christianity."[[138]](#footnote-169)

Besides many challenges and persecutions, the church in Nepal started to grow significantly after 1951. Above studies show that the key factors for church growth in Nepal in later period (since 1951) are vision for the unreached Nepalese people in Nepal, committed leadership, active laity in evangelism, social structure, the phenomena of healing and miracle, discipleship through cell groups, and transformations of Nepalese Christian's lives. Church growth happened with God's sovereignty and human submissive effort.

## Church as a Source of Transformation

### Meaning and Definition of Church

The church is the body of Christ, and it is made up of called people. It is not a building, but it is an assembly of God's people. Ott and Wilson define the church as a spiritual entity, conceived by the Father (Eph. 1:3–6), built by Christ (Matt. 16:18), and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22).[[139]](#footnote-171)

They assert,

The early church fathers often spoke of the church as the fellowship of the saints. Emphasis was rightly placed on the church as a people rather than as an institution. Essential attributes of the church were summarized in the Nicene Creed (AD 381) as one (unity), holy (sanctified life), catholic (universal, for all people), and apostolic (based upon the teaching of the apostles). These attributes have been variously interpreted throughout the history of the church, but they are confessed by nearly all Christians.[[140]](#footnote-172)

The church is God’s primary vehicle for manifesting the nature of the kingdom of God in this age and among all people.[[141]](#footnote-173) Paul says,

Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" Eph 1:21-23).

### Importance of Local Church

Hybels says, "The local church is the hope of the world."[[142]](#footnote-174) Hybels adds, "No other organization on earth is like the church. Nothing even comes close."[[143]](#footnote-175) One major facet of the beauty of the local church is its power to transform the human heart.[[144]](#footnote-176) Hybels rightly claims,

There is nothing like the local church when it’s working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalized of this world. Whatever the capacity for human suffering, the church has a greater capacity for healing and wholeness.[[145]](#footnote-177)

A local church is the only way of transforming people's lives. God has the power to transform lives. He works through His local church. He has given authority to His local church. Jesus said,

I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Mat 16:18-19).

### Key Function of the Church

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## Church Growth

Neil Cole rightly says, "Most warm-blooded living things grow to a point and reproduce. This is how the body of Christ is to grow."[[146]](#footnote-190) God has always wanted people to multiply and cover the earth with His glory, and this reality has implications for local churches as well. Cole is correct when he says, "The kingdom of God is meant to be decentralized, but people tend to centralize. ... The Church has been given a command to spread out and fill the earth as well."[[147]](#footnote-191)

Similarly, local churches also need to be grown, multiply, and spread. Cole claims, "The New Covenant, established by Jesus' own blood spilled as a sacrifice, was to release a decentralized nation of priests who would multiply and fill the earth with His presence."[[148]](#footnote-192)

Cole, however, provides important remarks regarding church growth

Regarding the expansion of the church Cole makes a very important point: growth can only be brought about by God. He states,

Bible tells us throughout that only God can cause growth. Trying to cause growth is not possible for us and only confuses people. Worse than that, when we try to cause growth, we take upon our shoulders God's work, which can be blasphemous, human-centered, and prideful. This also sets many people up for disappointment when we promise them growth and we do not deliver.[[149]](#footnote-196)

Cole is correct to point out that God is the primary author of church growth. Many times, mission agencies and groups make futile attempts to build the church simply via human labor. Cole further says,

Pouring more money time into growing strategies does not create any more growth... if churches invested more time, energy, and money in planting seeds, they would not have to work hard at growing, and the harvest would be much more abundant.[[150]](#footnote-197)

It demonstrates that while church growth is important, it is not the main goal. The goal is to see lives transformed through Christ.

### Healthy Church Environment and Church Growth

The church is the place where believers exercise their faith most. If they find a healthy environment, they can grow more. Rainer and Geiger in their book called 'Simple Church', emphasize the healthy environment. They called it a healthy church. Rainer and Geiger asserts,

In 1 Corinthians 3, believers are called God's children (v. 1), God's field (v. 9), and God's building (v. 9). We are God's children. We begin as spiritual babies because we are born again (John 3:3). Our movement into spiritual adulthood is a process, that process is critical. Just as babies need the right environments to grow physically, people need the right environment to grow spiritually. We are God's field. Fields do not bear fruit or crops on command. They blossom in process, and to do so properly, they need the right environment and the right nutrients. Children, fields, and buildings grow in the process. They do not mature overnight. They are not built in a day... Children, Fields, and buildings need the right environments to facilitate the process of growth. Children need nurturing, touch, food, and love. The field needs water, care, and farming. A building needs workers, materials.[[151]](#footnote-203)

According to Rainer and Geiger, a healthy environment is essential for church growth. The right environment in the church includes caring, leading, and feeding the believers. We can see another great example of a healthy environment in the Book of Acts:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NAU).

Giving brief description of a healthy church, Day asserts,

A church guided by its context, a church where the connectedness and uniqueness of each member is understood, a praying church, a church empowered by the Holy Spirit, a church that equips its members for ministry, an evangelistic church, a Bible believing church, a loving church, a worshiping church, a unified church, a church with exemplary leaders, a growing church, a disciple-making church, a servant led church, a church with small groups, a church as community, a church with one Lord – Jesus, a visionary church, a caring church, a church passionate for its mission, a disciple-building church, a church with every member involved, a church where members serve according to their giftedness, a church that sought to fulfill the Great Commission, a church that sought to live according to the Great Commandments, a church that is balanced in its functions, a serving church, a church with empowering leaders, and a church with authentic community.[[152]](#footnote-204)

### Marks of Healthy Church

A healthy church has a pervasive concern with church growth—not simply growing numbers but growing members.

In his book, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Mark Dever outlines nine characteristics of a healthy church. He claims, "A healthy church has a pervasive concern with church growth—not simply growing numbers but growing members." He correctly asserts that the church is a healthy church whose members are healthy. He lists nine characteristics of a healthy church that also apply to healthy Christians.

#### Expositional Preaching

According to Dever, the first mark of a healthy church is 'Expositional Preaching'. He claims,

We're not called to preach merely moral exhortations or history lessons ore social commentaries (Though any of those things may be a prat of good preaching). We are called to preach the Word of God to the church of God and to everyone in his creation.[[153]](#footnote-205)

Dever claims, "The great task of the preacher is to 'hold out the word of life' to people who need it for their souls."[[154]](#footnote-206) He further says, "The preaching of the Word must be central. Sound, expositional preaching is often the fountainhead of growth in a church.[[155]](#footnote-207)

#### Biblical Theology

Dever asserts, "One of the chief marks of a healthy church is a biblical understanding of God in his character and his ways with us."[[156]](#footnote-208) We must comprehend the truths the Bible reveals about God and ourselves.[[157]](#footnote-209) Dever states,

Sound teaching in our churches must include a clear commitment to the teaching of the Bible, even if those teachings are neglected by many churches. If we are to learn the sound doctrine of the Bible, we must study even the doctrines that may be difficult or potentially divisive, but that are foundational for our understanding of God. Theology is not merely and abstruse, abstract, academic affair.[[158]](#footnote-210)

#### The Gospel

Dever states, "Christianity has a specific, cognitive content. It is not a religious enthusiasm. It is not a deep personal intuition. It is news—news that says something about ourselves, about God, about Jesus."[[159]](#footnote-211) He makes the following arguments on the Gospel,

True Christianity is realistic about the dark side of our world, our life, our nature, our hearts. But true Christianity is not ultimately pessimistic or morally indifferent, encouraging us to settle in and accept the truth about our fallen state. No, the news that Christians have to bring is not just that our depravity is so pervasive but that God’s plans for us are so wonderful—because he knows what he made us for.[[160]](#footnote-212)

#### A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

Dever argues, "Conversion includes both the change of the heart toward God that is repentance, and the belief and trust in Christ and his Word that is faith."[[161]](#footnote-213)

#### A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

True biblical evangelism is never forced onto anyone. It is not personal testimony nor social action or political involvement. It does not come via evangelism or apologetics. Evangelizing involves warning people of their lost state, leading them to repent, and encouraging them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It also involves declaring on behalf of God what He has done to save sinners. Dever claims,

According to the Bible, evangelism is simply telling the good news; it does not include making sure that the other person responds to it correctly... the fruit of evangelism comes from God, not from our clever techniques or personal passion for what we are doing.[[162]](#footnote-214)

#### A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

The church is a group of individuals who affirm and provide proof that they have been saved only by God's mercy, for his glory, by faith alone, and in Christ alone.[[163]](#footnote-215) The primary purposes of the church are to strengthen the faith in Christ, evangelize the world with the gospel of Christ, expose false teachings and false gospels, edify the church via mutual support, and glorify God with praise and honor. Dever rightly claims, "Church membership puts into practice what the Bible teaches about the self-conscious commitments that should exist within a church—the commitments between an individual Christian, his or her pastors, and a defined gathering of Christians."[[164]](#footnote-216)

Dever asserts,

The responsibilities and duties of members of a Christian church are simply the responsibilities and duties of Christians. Church members, like Christians, are to be baptized and to regularly attend the Lord’s Table. We are to hear God’s Word and to obey it. We are to regularly fellowship together for mutual edification. We are to love God, one another, and those outside our fellowship, and we are to evidence the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). We are to worship God in all the activities of our home, work, community, and life.[[165]](#footnote-217)

#### Biblical Church Discipline

The church, as the bride of Christ is obligated to uphold holiness and purity. Discipline is a significant phenomenon that helps keep the church blameless and holy. According to Dever, there are five excellent reasons for enforcing church discipline: 1) for the benefit of the offender; 2) for the benefit of other Christians, who will be made aware of the dangers of sin; 3) for the health of the church as a whole; 4) for the church's public witness; and 5) for the glory of God, as we serve as an example of his holiness.[[166]](#footnote-218) Dever is right when he states,

Biblical church discipline is simple obedience to God and a simple confession that we need help. We cannot live the Christian life alone. Our purpose in church discipline is positive for the individual disciplined, for other Christians as they see the real danger of sin, for the health of the church as a whole, and for the corporate witness of the church to those outside. Most of all, our holiness is to reflect the holiness of God. It should mean something to be a member of the church, not for our pride’s sake but for God’s name’s sake. Biblical church discipline is a mark of a healthy church.[[167]](#footnote-219)

#### A Concern for Discipleship and Growth

Members who are sincerely concerned for their spiritual development are indicative of a good church. In a flourishing church, members strive to become better followers of Jesus.[[168]](#footnote-220) The church will undoubtedly expand as members follow Christ as disciples. Bible says, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (Act 6:1, 7 NAU).

#### Biblical Church Leadership

The necessity for authority in society, the home, and the church has always been acknowledged by Christianity.[[169]](#footnote-221) Christ is the head and *the Leader* of the church. The Bible says, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything" (Col 1:18 NAU). It also says, "... Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman..." (1 Cor. 11:3 NAU). Dever asserts, "It's no surprise then, that inside local congregations, the leaders are to reflect the character of Christ, something of his roles and responsibilities."[[170]](#footnote-222)

Hybels is correct to assert,

Behind the scenes of every prevailing ministry, I discovered courageous, servant-oriented leaders. Throughout history, whenever God was ready to begin a new work, he would tap a potential leader on the shoulder and give him or her a leadership assignment. In the Old Testament, he chose leaders like Moses, David, Nehemiah, and Esther. New Testament he chose people like Peter and Paul.[[171]](#footnote-223)

## Church Growth

The church growth movement exploded on the scene in the 1970s by Donald McGavran of Fuller Seminary, who brought his insights gained as a missionary to the North Church.[[172]](#footnote-224) As a missionary in India during the 1930s, McGavran witnessed a failed effort on the part of the Christian church to evangelize the lost.[[173]](#footnote-225) McGavran gradually developed numerous assumptions, which over time turned out to be the cornerstones of the present Church Growth movement.[[174]](#footnote-226)

Towns argues,

To McGavran, evangelism was an input term, meaning first the lost should be evangelized (i.e., “gospelized”), and when that was done, they would be baptized and brought into the church. (As a result, the church grew, i.e., the output of evangelism). To McGavran, Church Growth occurred as a result of evangelism. McGavran rationalized: Why not use the term “Church Growth” as an output term to give new meaning to the movement of evangelism. Hence, he used the term “Church Growth” synonymously with evangelism, but to him the name “Church Growth” meant more than just getting people saved.[[175]](#footnote-227)

Towns provides the following three definitions of McGavran's Church Growth Theory:

First, many people see Church Growth as growth in numbers (i.e., the growth of the church) ...The second meaning to the term is that Church Growth is church planting. McGavran saw the challenge of carrying out the Great Commission, *matheteusate panta ta ethne* (Matt. 28:19) ... The third aspect of Church Growth is seen in its scientific base of research (i.e., Church Growth is a discipline that takes its place under systematic theology).[[176]](#footnote-228)

There are several criticisms of McGavran's Church Growth theory. However, Tucker rightly says,

True historic, McGavran church growth thinking is a viable, Bible-centered missiological approach whether contextualized to the United States or focused on any people group in the world. It is deeply passionate about a harvest of souls that retains its growth and moves its converts into meaningful church membership. It has a conservative, evangelical theological base and focuses on conversion growth.[[177]](#footnote-229)

Criticism of the Church Growth Movement is nothing new.[[178]](#footnote-230) McIntosh says, "Since the founding of the Church Growth Movement in 1955 with the publication of Donald McGavran’s landmark book The Bridges of God, debate over the theology, theory, and principles of the movement has come and gone almost yearly."[[179]](#footnote-231)

Supporting the Church Growth Movement McIntosh further asserts,

It seems apparent that the recent critics of the Church Growth Movement have been concerned with popular church growth practice, rather than core Church Growth theory. In fairness, future criticisms need to be more careful in defining terms and differentiating concerns between core Church Growth Thought and popular church growth practice.[[180]](#footnote-232)

Focusing upon the important facts, Rainer rightly says, "Whether the Church Growth Movement thrives or dies is not the real issue or concern. Our concern should be the winning of people to Christ, particularly through the ministries of the local church."[[181]](#footnote-233)

### Discovering Church Growth Principle

Defining the Church Growth Principle, McGavran and Arn assert,

Discovering Church Growth principles is not difficult. One observes where the church is growing, where God is blessing the efforts of his servants with factual, actual church growth, where the number of members is increasing and new congregations are being born, and where men and women are introduced to Jesus Christ, commit their lives to him, and become responsible members of his church.[[182]](#footnote-234)

McGavran and Arn rightly says, "There is a beautiful combination of God and man in the growth of his church. Churches intensely conscious of God's presence and God's passion for the salvation of men find they have all kinds of unsuspected resources in themselves."[[183]](#footnote-235)

According to McGavran and Arn, church Growth is not optional; it is a commandment of God. Churches must grow by the expansion of existing congregations and by extension establishing new congregations.[[184]](#footnote-236) McGavran and Arn say, "Growth occurs as specific congregations increase their membership (expansion) and as churches plant new congregation (extension)."[[185]](#footnote-237) However, Linssen argues, "Any leader who desires to see their church grow numerically needs to focus, not on growing numerically, but on becoming better. Big does not equal great and great does not equal big."[[186]](#footnote-238)

According to McGavran and Arn, each church grows in different ways and has different growth potential, and the potential of the same church will be different at different times.[[187]](#footnote-239)

### Importance of Church Growth

McGavran and Wagner give an important statement, "In this world, mission must be what God desires. It is not a human activity but *missio Dei*, the mission of God, who himself remains in charge of it."[[188]](#footnote-240) According to McGavran and Wagner, God is the in-charge of the church growth movement, however, the church also has its role to assist God's mission.

### Types of Church Growth

According to McGavran and Wagner, three kinds of church growth should be distinguished: biological, transfer, and conversion.[[189]](#footnote-241) McGavran and Wagner

Biological growth derives from those born into Christian families... Biological growth is good growth...By transfer growth is meant the increase of certain congregations at the expense of others. Transfer growth is important. Every church should follow up its members and conserve as many of them as possible. But transfer growth will never extend the church, for unavoidably many are lost along the way ... The third kind is conversion growth, in which those outside the church come to rest their faith intelligently on Jesus Christ and are baptized and added to the Lord in his church. This is the only kind of growth by which the good news of salvation can spread to all ...The goal of mission is to have a truly indigenous congregation in every community of every culture.[[190]](#footnote-242)

According to McGavran church growth occurs in four ways[[191]](#footnote-243)

1. *Internal growth:* increase in subgroups within existing churches and continually perfecting Christians, men and women who know the Bible and practice the faith ... Evangelism, or bringing nominal Christian to active commitment to Christ, is included here.
2. *Expansion growth:* each congregation expands as it converts non-Christians and take more of them, as well as transfer members, into self.
3. *Extension growth:* each congregation plants daughter churches among its own kind of people in its neighborhood or region.
4. *Bridging growth:* congregations and denominations find bridges to other segments of the population and, crossing the bridges of God, multiply companies of the committed on the other side.

In any type of church growth, the numerical approach is important. McGavran and Wager assert, "The numerical approach is essential to understanding church growth. The church is made up of countable people and there is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting them. The numerical approach is used in all worthwhile human endeavor."[[192]](#footnote-244)

## Key Factors for Church Growth

McGavran and Wagner assert, "As we look at any case of growth or nongrowth, whether it be a local church or an entire denomination, we find that understanding it involves consideration of three important sets of factors. According to McGavran and Wagner, the following are the three sets of factors:[[193]](#footnote-245):

*Contextual factors:* These are political, sociological, cultural, and environmental factors over which the church or the mission has no control. They may be local factors, or they may extend to regions and entire nations.

*Institutional factors:* These are factors that the church or denomination can control.

*Spiritual factors:* The Holy Spirit is sovereign, and he is not subject to contextual or institutional factors. He frequently acts in surprising, nontraditional ways, and it is up to those Christian leaders who want to be effective in growth to have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Based upon three important sets of factors for church growth, it is appropriate to say that God is sovereign in His work of mission. The church can only rely on God for *spiritual factors.* For the *contextual factors*, the only thing the church can do is respond appropriately because it has no control over the environmental factors. Thus, this study will focus on *institutional factors* for church growth. The church or institution is always in charge of its strategy and choices. There are many *institutional factors* for church growth. However, this study will focus on a few important key factors for church growth.

### Vision

According to Malphurs and Penfold, any ministry, whether it be in a church or parachurch, needs vision. Without a distinct, God-inspired vision, the ministry is useless because it cannot express what God has commissioned it to achieve.[[194]](#footnote-246) Leadership would be severely hampered in the absence of a vision. Without having a clear vision, a pastor will be unable to describe where he is headed or even where the church is heading.[[195]](#footnote-247)

Vision is a clear, exciting picture of God's future for your ministry as you believe it can and must be.[[196]](#footnote-248) Malphurs and Penfold make some excellent observations about the significance of vision: "Vision clarifies direction of where to go. Vision impacts the leadership. Vision motivates People. Vision prompts giving. Vision creates energy. Vision fosters risk taking. Vision sustains ministry."[[197]](#footnote-249)

Malphurs and Penfold say, "The church's mission is to make disciples. It includes evangelism, winning people to Christ, and edification, growing people up or maturing them in Christ."[[198]](#footnote-250) They emphasize the importance of vision in carrying out the mission of the Church by stating the following:

The vision paints a picture of what the church will look like when it arrives at or accomplishes its mission. The painter of the picture is is the vision caster. The mission clarifies the church's future, while the vision inspires people to want to go there.[[199]](#footnote-251)

### Prayer

Dever and Alexander assert, "Prayer shows our dependence on God. It honors Him as the source of all blessings, and it reminds us that converting individuals and growing churches are His works, not ours (1 Cor. 2:14-16; 3:6-7)."[[200]](#footnote-252) McGavran and Wagner rightly say, "While an evangelical awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit in the church of Christ and thus depends on the initiative of almighty God, it is usually granted to those who pray earnestly for it."[[201]](#footnote-253)

### Power Evangelism

McGavran and Arn claim, "Churches grow when priority is given to effective evangelism, which includes 'proclamation and persuasion'... We proclaim Christ in the 'heart language' of the person, in his or her dialect, vocabulary, way of thinking, income, and education."[[202]](#footnote-254)

McGavran and Wagner say, "The role of the Holy Spirit in the growth of the church is supreme. Only God, not human forces, builds the church. Jesus said, 'I will build my church' (see Matt. 16:18)."[[203]](#footnote-255) Emphasizing the importance of healing ministry in the church McGavran and Wagner give a significant statement,

My considered recommendation is that missionaries and Christian believers in most populations ought to be following the biblical injunction to pray for the sick (James 5:14-15). When notable healings have taken place in your denomination, when some Pentecostals mount a great healing campaign, then say to yourself, “This is the time to strike, while the iron is hot.”[[204]](#footnote-256)

### Worship

The church is here on earth as a glimpse of God's assemblies in Heaven. We can taste heaven when we honor God in worship. Public worship in the church seems so important for church growth. Preaching Gospel in the church or in the community, both are also vital to renew and save people. Stetzer and Dodson say in their book called *Comeback Churches*, "Most growing churches we know have dynamic worship and excellent preaching. If the Word is preached faithfully and fervently, it will accomplish God's objectives."[[205]](#footnote-257) Almost every book on church growth mentions the worship experience is the catalyzer for the growth of the church.[[206]](#footnote-258)

### Preaching the Word of God

Dever and Alexander assert,

There's only one thing that's biblically necessary for building the church, and that's the preached Word of God ... God's Word has always been His chosen instrument to create, convict, convert, and conform His people.[[207]](#footnote-259)

Dever and Alexander claim,

Preaching the content and intent of God's Word is what unleashes the power of God on the people of God, because God's power for building His people is in His Word, particularly as we find it in Gospel (Rom. 1:16). God's Word builds His church. So preaching His Gospel is primary.[[208]](#footnote-260)

McGavran and Wagner rightly say,

Other factors are essential to the growth of the church: the Bible must be taught (and often translated), the word must be proclaimed, and—constrained by love—Christians must seek to persuade their intimates and relatives that it is a wonderful thing to become a follower of the Lord of life."[[209]](#footnote-261)

McGavran and Wagner assert,

Knowledge of the Bible is also necessary. It does not invariably lead to revival; but unless it is there, revival in the classic sense does not usually occur." [[210]](#footnote-262) Long years of attentive Bible study in homes and churches preceded revivals in the churches of Europe, America, and Korea.[[211]](#footnote-263)

### Values

According to Milton Rokeach, value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct (way of behaving) or state of existence (such as peace or prosperity) is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse code of conduct or end state of existence.[[212]](#footnote-264) Malphurs defines a church's core values as its constant, passionate, sacred core believes that drive its ministry.[[213]](#footnote-265) Malphurs claims,

A ministry based on clearly articulated core values drives a fixed stake in the ground that says to all, "This is what we stand for; this is what we are all about; this is who we are; this is what we can do for you." Thus, values are defining. They give each organization its unique identity in the ministry world.[[214]](#footnote-266)

Values are an important aspect of any ministry's culture because they affect a ministry in numerous ways.[[215]](#footnote-267) Malphurs gives the following ten reasons why core values are so crucial to Christian ministry:[[216]](#footnote-268)

1. Values determine the ministry's distinctiveness.
2. Values dictate personal involvement.
3. Values communicate what is important.
4. Values embrace positive change.
5. Values influence overall behavior.
6. Values inspire people to action.
7. Values enhance credible leadership.
8. Values shape ministry character.
9. Values Contribute to ministry success.
10. Values affect strategic planning.

### Leadership Development

Malphurs asserts, "Leadership is a key to success or failure of a given enterprise ... In the local church, pastoral leadership is also a key, if not the key, to vibrant church life."[[217]](#footnote-269) Malphurs and Penfold are correct when they assert that everything rises and falls with leadership. They claim,

Indeed, we see this truth reflected in many places: in Old Testament kings and leaders; statements from the prophets; Jesus's words to the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees; New Testament statements concerning the pastoral leadership; and finally, Jesus's communication to the seven churches of the Revelation.[[218]](#footnote-270)

Malphurs and Penfold rightly say, "A great number of churches are characterized by an inward, self-serving focus, territorialism, bullies, power brokers, passivity, disillusionment, lack of a clearly defined propose and vision, all accompanied by division and conflict."[[219]](#footnote-271) By making the following claims, they substantiate their claim, "The problem is that there's a lack in the church of strong visionary leadership, not necessarily a lack of leaders (there's a difference!). Churches aren't really developing visionary leaders."[[220]](#footnote-272) To build growing, multiplying churches, every church needs good leaders.[[221]](#footnote-273) Leadership is key to developing healthy churches. Dever and Alexander assert,

Churches rarely grow past the maturity of their leaders. It may be possible, but it is certainly not likely. The implication is that choosing elders can be either a significant help or a significant hindrance to the maturity and growth of the congregation. Mature able leaders will model godly heath and growth.[[222]](#footnote-274)

Chang claims, "The best place for leadership development is in the context of the local church. The church has a major role to play in assessing, training, and supporting the developing leader."[[223]](#footnote-275)

Hybels says, "Leadership development never happens accidentally. It only happens when some leader has a white-hot vision for it, when his or her pulse rate doubles at the very thought of pumping into the organizational system a steady stream of competent leaders."[[224]](#footnote-276) Additionally, he says, "Creating a vision, of course, is just the beginning. The next challenge is to come up with a strategy for turning that vision into reality."[[225]](#footnote-277) He points, "So a leadership development plan has to address these three phases: 1. Identifying emerging leaders; 2. Investing in the development of emerging leaders; 3. Entrusting responsibility to emerging leaders."[[226]](#footnote-278) He asserts, " When we have identified emerging leaders, and when we have built into them, trained them, and adequately prepared them, then we must entrust these folks with real responsibilities."[[227]](#footnote-279)

### Discipleship

Dann Spader correctly emphasizes the importance of discipleship when he says, "During His earthly, Jesus loved God, loved people, and made disciples. And He calls us to do the same."[[228]](#footnote-280) Bob Rogniel asserts, "Discipleship is a relationship and a journey. When Jesus invited his disciples to follow him, he began by telling them about the New Covenant and then showed them what a Covenant relationship looks like."[[229]](#footnote-281)

Spader claims, "Disciple-making for Jesus meant meeting the needs of people where they were spiritually and then challenging them to next level. His goal was multiplication, and withe laser focus He trained His few disciples to multiply their lives in others."[[230]](#footnote-282)

McGavran and Arn assert, "Church Growth people believe effective evangelism means making disciples and responsible members of Christ's church. Many methods of evangelism emphasize making decisions. Church Growth people are concerned with making disciples."[[231]](#footnote-283)

Phil Maynard says, "Members can be disciples and disciples can be members, but being a member does not automatically make one a growing, maturing disciple of Jesus Christ."[[232]](#footnote-284) He adds, "Discipleship is not just about information. It is about behaviors. Discipleship is not just about education. It is about transformation."[[233]](#footnote-285)

Maynard asserts,

Disciples experience a changed future through their acceptance of Jesus. Disciples undergo a changed lifestyle that is manifested through Christ-oriented values, goals, perspectives, activities, and relationships. Disciples mature into a changed worldview, attributable to a deeper comprehension of the true meaning and impact of Christianity.[[234]](#footnote-286)

#### Reasons for Low Discipleship Rates

Ogden identifies a few key reasons why discipleship rates are low.[[235]](#footnote-287)

##### Diversion from Primary Calling

The pastors' basic calling to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" has been neglected, which is the first reason for the low condition of discipleship.[[236]](#footnote-288)

##### Discipling Through Programs

We have attempted to make disciples through programs, which is the second reason why the discipleship rate is so low.[[237]](#footnote-289)

##### Reducing the Christian Life

The gospel has been reduced to the everlasting advantages we receive from Jesus rather than living as his followers, which is the third reason for the low estate of discipleship.[[238]](#footnote-290)

##### Two-Tiered Understanding of Discipleship

The fourth reason for the low level of discipleship is that we have relegated discipleship to super-Christians rather than regular Christians.[[239]](#footnote-291)

##### Unwillingness to Call People to Discipleship

The fifth reason for the low level of discipleship is that leaders have been reluctant to invite individuals to become disciples.[[240]](#footnote-292)

##### An Inadequate View of the Church

We have a poor understanding of the church as a discipleship community, which is the sixth reason for the low estate of discipleship.[[241]](#footnote-293)

##### No Clear Pathway to Maturity

The lack of a clear, public pathway to maturity in the majority of churches is the sixth factor contributing to the low level of discipleship.[[242]](#footnote-294)

##### Lack of Personal Discipline

The fact that the majority of Christians have never received personal discipleship is the eighth and last reason for the low level of discipleship, as well as maybe the most alarming.[[243]](#footnote-295)

#### Discipleship Model from current church culture

According to Ogden, the connection between Paul and Timothy is the biblical model that typically forms the basis for our understanding of discipling.[[244]](#footnote-296) Ogden lists a few fundamental presumptions that guide this concept of discipleship:

* Older person with a younger person (like a parent-child relationship)
* More spiritually mature with less spiritually mature (usually associated with an age difference)
* Teacher-student relationship (learned with the unlearned)
* More experienced with the less experienced (passing on distilled wisdom)
* One in authority over one under authority (hierarchical)[[245]](#footnote-297)

Ogden asserts about Jesus's Discipleship model,

Though a discipling relationship is a type of mentoring, it is distinct from one-on-one mentoring roles. ... In a discipling relationship, the disciple, following Jesus’ model, initiates the relationship and defines the agenda. The expressed purpose of discipling relationships is to lay the foundation of spiritual practices, core doctrinal teaching, transformative character qualities and outward ministry focus, so a person has the tools necessary to disciple others. In other words, discipling comes with defined content to be mastered, internalized and then passed on.[[246]](#footnote-298)

##### Jesus's Exemplary Role in Disciple Making

Ogden Claims, "To get the disciples ready, Jesus played a series of important roles, commensurate with the disciples’ preparedness."[[247]](#footnote-299) He listed four stages of Jesus' preparatory empowerment model, which are as follows:[[248]](#footnote-300)

Stage one, Jesus was a living example: The disciples paid close attention to him as they started to learn his message, demeanor, and ministry.[[249]](#footnote-301)

Stage two, Jesus was a provocative teacher: Jesus' goal was to dispel the disciples' false beliefs and presumptions that they had acquired from the religious and secular world in opposition to God, in addition to introducing them to a fresh view of the kingdom. [[250]](#footnote-302)

Stage three, Jesus was a supportive coach: Jesus gave the disciples precise instructions before they left, and they knew they could come back to him for a sympathetic debriefing.[[251]](#footnote-303)

Stage four, Jesus was the ultimate delegator: Following Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were scattered, but they had digested enough of his teachings to come together again after his resurrection and receive the Holy Spirit's power at Pentecost. They had absorbed his ministry.[[252]](#footnote-304)

##### Paul's Model in Discipleship

Developmental Stage One, Imitation (Infancy): Paul combines his parental self-understanding with a call to the churches in Corinth, Philippi and Thessalonica to imitate his life.[[253]](#footnote-305)

The word *imitate* here is *mimeomai*, from which we get the English word *mimic*. *Mimeomai* is used in a number of places (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9), accompanied often by the word *typos*, which is translated variously as “example,” “model” or “pattern.” In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul qualifies his previously unqualified admonition to imitate himself by adding, “Be imitators of me, *as I am of Christ*.”[[254]](#footnote-306)

Developmental Stage Two, Identification (Childhood): "Loving parents tie their welfare and happiness to the welfare and happiness of their children. In this regard, Paul had the heart of a parent when it came to the welfare of his spiritual children."[[255]](#footnote-307)

Developmental Stage Three, Exhortation (Adolescence): "The adolescent stage of discipleship is very much like the adolescent stage of a teenager. During adolescence, a critical issue is building confidence so that teens can blossom into their own persons."[[256]](#footnote-308)

Developmental Stage Four, Participation (Adulthood): At the adult level, learning transforms into a shared process of development.[[257]](#footnote-309) Arriving at maturity is the aim of the disciplining process and mutuality identifies the maturity stage.[[258]](#footnote-310) Exhorting the person to become everything that God intended him or her to be is a defining characteristic of the adolescent period of growth.[[259]](#footnote-311)

#### Process of Discipleship

Tamang claims, "Where there is discipleship, church growth is automatic."[[260]](#footnote-312) However, the process of discipleship is never ending process. It is a lifelong investment in someone's life to make him/her like Christ. It needs effort and commitment. Tamang rightly says,

Discipleship does not have an end, instead it is a lifelong process. It is due to the lack of proper understanding of discipleship that people practice it just for a certain period of time. The process of discipleship never stops because people coming to Christ will never stop. In the Nepali context, people are rallying to churches, at least for their physical needs, such as healing, peace, etc. If we fail to present the whole gospel and disciple them properly, then we are endangering many souls.[[261]](#footnote-313)

### The Mission Mindset

According to McNeal, "The missional conversation is not just changing the scorecard for the church, it is actually and fundamentally changing the game."[[262]](#footnote-314) He emphasizes,

Understanding church as the people of God partnering with him in his redemptive mission in the world allows for much broader bandwidth of how the church express itself in the world. It allows the church to move beyond the congregational existence and practices. It lays the foundation for seeing church as missional community.[[263]](#footnote-315)

By putting his points forward, McNeal contrasts the differences between churches as congregations and churches as missional communities. He claims, "Whereas worship and teaching are the major convening elements of church as congregation, in missional communities' fellowship, life debriefing, and service fuel the core rhythms."[[264]](#footnote-316) He makes a comparison between missional communities and congregations' priorities. He claims,

In congregations the focus of the weekly gathering is on what happens in the gathering, with much preparation during the week for the service, the class, whatever ... In missional communities the focus of the gathering is on what happens away from the gathering. Everyday life is the core curriculum.[[265]](#footnote-317)

Atoyebi rightly says,

The context of mission is borne out of divine intervention in human affairs. It is aimed at achieving a fulfilled relationship between God and man on the vertical axis, and between fellow humans on the horizontal line. Both axes converge on the object of mission, personified by the cross of the Savior Jesus Christ.[[266]](#footnote-318)

## Challenges of Church Growth

While the churches in Nepal have been expanding, they are nevertheless faced with a few significant obstacles. Rongong says about these challenges in this way,

Discipling and the obedience or shortage of leadership has often been the main challenge in the growth and development of a healthy church ... The factors which have adversely affected the local churches in the villages and even in the towns, is the unhealthy competitions between church groups, denominations or agencies in adopting those churches.[[267]](#footnote-319)

According to Rongong, there are two main factors for church growth and stagnation: Discipleship and Leadership Development. The church's primary responsibility is to make disciples who will spread the gospel and train leaders to maintain the movement. Jesus said to disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Mat 28:19-20 NAU). Similarly, Paul said to Timothy, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2Ti 2:2 NAU).

McGavran asserts, "Growth is not automatic. There is strain, labor, travail, pain, and anguish. In the growth of a church there is as much stress as in the birth and growth of a child."[[268]](#footnote-320) McGavran strongly asserts, "Growth requires decision -now! Growth imposes risk-now! Growth requires action-now! Growth demands allocation of resources -now! Growth requires work-now. When this happens, God gives the increase!"[[269]](#footnote-321)

McGavran gives specific reasons behind church Growth, "Lack of holy living, lack of fervent prayer, lack of correct doctrine, lack of brotherly love are commonly mentioned as reasons for lack of Church Growth."[[270]](#footnote-322)

According to Gary McIntosh growth and declination is a regular process of the church. As human being experiences different cycle of life, churches also experience different life cycles. The only difference between human beings and the church is that human beings will die in the last stage where the church can be revitalized. However, it needs effort. McIntosh argues,

All churches are inclined to follow a basic pattern of growth, plateau, and decline. Some travel along the life cycle faster ore slower. ...A church usually grows or declines from stage to stage; that is, it is rare for a church to skip the phase ... A church's growth and decline do not progress steadily from stage to stage ... The longer a church is plateaued at one stage of growth, the more difficult it becomes to move to the next stage ... Normally, churches that remain vital for long periods of time experience not one single life cycle but several life cycles of growth, plateau, and decline. ... Churches can experience renewal at any point in their life cycle.[[271]](#footnote-323)

### The Cycle of Growth and Decline of Local Churches

Local Churches experience a predictable life cycle of growth and decline.[[272]](#footnote-324) McIntosh asserts the fact that "Undoubtedly times of growth are more exciting than times of decline, yet anyone who has worked in a church for very long has experienced both ups and downs."[[273]](#footnote-325) As a church grows older and changes in size, it necessitates different leadership styles, programming adjustments, and training requirements, and presents a variety of new difficulties that must be handled.[[274]](#footnote-326) McIntosh claims, "Other than its basic beliefs and values, the two major forces that impact a church's growth are its age and its size."[[275]](#footnote-327) McIntosh asserts the life cycle of a church as follows:

#### Emerging Stage

"The *emerging stage* of a church is unusually challenging and exciting, as a dream for a new church is conceived, nurtured, birthed, and stabilized. Technically this stage lasts around five years, beginning with the new church's first public worship service."[[276]](#footnote-328) McIntosh claims, "During the emerging phase, the founding pastor is the key player whose main role is communicating the new church's mission and casting a vision of a great future for the church that others are able to own."[[277]](#footnote-329) Affirming this claims McIntosh says, "Churches in the emerging stage of their life cycle must develop and cast a vision that attracts and holds the number of people and the resources necessary to build a church."[[278]](#footnote-330)

#### Growing Stage

In terms of numerical growth, the first ten to twenty years of a church's existence are frequently the best years; churches typically take twenty to twenty-five years to achieve their maximum size.[[279]](#footnote-331) McIntosh claims, "While the first five years get an emerging church established, it is the next fifteen years when most of the growth tends to take place."[[280]](#footnote-332) The key traits of this stage are highly motivated ministry volunteers, increasing attendance, teamwork ministry, the pastor's exemplary life and ministry, and effective management systems.[[281]](#footnote-333) McIntosh argues, "Growth creates challenges that, when handled well, propel the congregation farther along the life cycle."[[282]](#footnote-334) According to McIntosh, the main challenges of this stage are increasing expectations of growing congregations, limited resources, and a lack of leadership development.[[283]](#footnote-335) McIntosh says, "Growing people create growing churches. If a church cannot design and put into place a process of leadership development, growth will soon overwhelm the current leaders to the point that they burn out."[[284]](#footnote-336)

#### Consolidating Stage

Churches that enter the consolidating stages of congregational life cycle are usually quite healthy.[[285]](#footnote-337) McIntosh says, "The mission and purpose of the church remain strong as a church enters the third stage of its life cycle, but changes are in the air. Leaders appear relaxed, with a clear vision for the church's future."[[286]](#footnote-338) He claims, "Leaders and attenders are confident they can do about anything they wish, due to the years of past success. Everyone is appropriately proud of the church and its track record, maintained for the last two decades."[[287]](#footnote-339) According to McIntosh, the major challenge facing the church consolidating phase is to renew its mission and vision, and the problem in this stage is that the entire church ministry is going well that no one senses a need to change anything.[[288]](#footnote-340) Recognizing the challenges, McIntosh suggests, "Churches entering the consolidation stage of their life cycle must communicate to the new generation the core values, mission, and vision of the church, and these must be communicate newcomers as well."[[289]](#footnote-341)

#### Declining Stage

In the declining stage, "the purpose of the church has been forgotten or outlived, and the major focus of the leaders is on keeping the current ministries going. Mission and vision are cloudy if they exist at all."[[290]](#footnote-342) According to McIntosh, the few comers that come to a declining church do not know the vision or mission of the church and they find it extremely difficult to get involved in ministries.[[291]](#footnote-343) McIntosh argues,

Churches in the declining state find that problems mount, resources dwindle, ministries decline, and people blame each other for the sad state of affairs. At least five specific challenges must be faced having to do with morale, resources, the blame game, facing reality, and the mission and vision of the church. ... The major challenge is keeping hope alive and morale up.[[292]](#footnote-344)

Recognizing the problem in this stage, McIntosh suggests that the church must restore its mission and vision for the future.[[293]](#footnote-345) Calling the congregation back to the mission of the church and developing a new vision for the future is essential.[[294]](#footnote-346) McIntosh claims, "In doing all this, pastors and leaders must be willing to suffer pain for canceling programs and diverting finances to new projects and ministries."[[295]](#footnote-347) He rightly says, "To some extend the future of a declining church depends on the level of pain the leaders are willing to endure."[[296]](#footnote-348)

#### Dying Stage

"[[297]](#footnote-349)The dying stage is the last step in the life cycle of a church."[[298]](#footnote-350) Although no one likes to think about churches passing away or closing their doors to ministry, many churches do so each year.[[299]](#footnote-351) McIntosh argues,

By the time a church enters the last stage of its life cycle, its sense of mission and vision is almost totally lost. If churches in this stage were honest, they would have to admit their essential purpose is simple survival.[[300]](#footnote-352)

Often in a dying church, change is perceived as thereat to the church's existence, and people seem unwilling to try anything new... The greatest challenge is leading the people to embrace necessary changes to allow God's spirit work anew life of the church.[[301]](#footnote-353)

Churches typically die slowly, but they are resilient, and if enough resources are available, they may survive for many years after their last viable ministry.[[302]](#footnote-354)

## Signs of Unhealthy Church

Davis claims, "One of the easiest ways to measure church vitality is by counting heads—membership and baptisms/conversions. If those numbers are flat (plateaued) or declining each year, that church may well be unhealthy, sliding toward eventual death."[[303]](#footnote-355) However, he further says,

However, numerical growth alone cannot be a measure of spiritual health. Some of the unhealthiest churches in the nation are characterized by the false doctrine of the prosperity gospel, but they are huge and growing numerically. Conversely, some churches may be quite healthy in many respects and seeing steady fruit in evangelism but are actually shrinking in number because the godly leadership is culling bloated rolls of past members who, by their chronic failure to attend worship, are displaying in their lives that they most likely were not born again. Other churches might have a good number of people attending and might see some baptisms, but they are toxic in their daily life because of long-standing church politics and unhealthy attitudes and practices.[[304]](#footnote-356)

McIntosh lists eight indicators of a church's condition that indicate revitalization is necessary.

### Low Morale

A church that is experiencing poor morale will experience a range of feelings, from joy, celebration, and enthusiasm to discouragement, hopelessness, and despair.[[305]](#footnote-357) McIntosh asserts, "People may feel they are disguising their true feelings from guests, but visitors can sense the true atmosphere within a few minutes of walking into the church building."[[306]](#footnote-358)

### Downward Momentum

McIntosh argues, "Decline or plateau is undesirable, as it translates into less disciples, resources, potentials, and effectiveness."[[307]](#footnote-359) According to McIntosh, when a church experiences a downhill momentum, it gradually drains and loses members. McIntosh claims, "The more cutbacks a church makes, the less impact it has, and a momentum develops that pulls the church ever more downward."[[308]](#footnote-360)

### Survival Mode

According to McIntosh, when people have spent years or even a few months in a downward atmosphere they will be discouraged. McIntosh claims, "They may even be angry with God, feeling that he has let them down."[[309]](#footnote-361) In this mode, the congregation will exhibit a protective attitude, and the leaders will adopt a defensive stance to shield themselves from additional hurt and danger. There are limitations to new approaches and creative solutions.[[310]](#footnote-362)

### Passive Attitudes

In the passive attitude, there will be no interest in the service among the believers. Even it is difficult to find the worker for the service. McIntosh asserts, "Indeed, this may be the number one challenge facing pastors and leaders. Closely related is a lack of financial giving and poor attendance at worship services."[[311]](#footnote-363) According to McIntosh, it is a clear sign of trouble when people have a wait-and-see attitude and every area of church ministry meets with a so-so response.[[312]](#footnote-364) McIntosh Claims, "Passive attitudes arise when there is a lack of vision. Vision brings excitement, commitment, and involvement. Whenever these attitudes are mission, church leaders know something is wrong."[[313]](#footnote-365)

### Consolidated Power

McIntosh argues,

One of the outcomes of church fights and splits is the consolidation of power by lay leaders. The loss of close friends brings pain that no one wants to relive. In and effort to protect themselves from additional pain, lay leaders grab the power and keep decision-making close to home. Anyone seeking to challenge a lay leader's newfound control is met with strong resistance...If the pastor is perceived to be a part of the problem, people lose respect for the pastoral office and consolidated power and control over all church functions.[[314]](#footnote-366)

### Lack of Vision

According to McIntosh, it is easy for a church to lose vision.[[315]](#footnote-367) Many pastors and leaders initially keep the vision but over a period they become tired of carrying the vision and excitement in the ministry. McIntosh argues,

Understanding a church's purpose (or mission) provides a biblical reason for church ministry, but it is vision that provides the energy, hope, and passion. When a church and its leaders lose a sense of vision, the ministry starts winding down.[[316]](#footnote-368)

### Toleration of Known Sin

According to McIntosh sometimes it is difficult to find why a church is struggling.[[317]](#footnote-369) McIntosh makes the following incredibly astute observation:

On the surface everything may look fine. The location might me extremely favorable - accessible, visible, expandable - but the church does not reach its potential. Mission, vision and goals are in place, but nothing works. Prayer abounds and new ministries are started, all to no avail.[[318]](#footnote-370)

McIntosh uses the example of a theater stage with a wide curtain separating the front part of the stage, where performances take place, from the rear, where rehearsals take place. McIntosh says,

In similar way, ministry has at least two dimensions: public and private. Sunday services, weekly small groups, and other programs are operated in the public domain -that is, in from of the curtain. Personal actions, attitudes, and emotions, what is usually referred to as character, are behind the curtain.[[319]](#footnote-371)

McIntosh suggests that when everything looks right on the surface, but the church is not producing the expected fruit, it is wise to look at character issues behind the scenes.[[320]](#footnote-372) There has a possibility to hide and ignore the sin, but it must be confronted in order to revive the church.

### Unproductive Ministries

According to McIntosh when unproductive ministries are taking place in the church the church starts to decline.[[321]](#footnote-373) The message never changes but methods are changing. Something work in the past is not necessarily work in the future. McIntosh rightly says,

Nearly every church can point to a time and particular ministry that worked well in the past. It might be a children's program, an approach to evangelism, or even a beloved pastor's unique style of preaching. Sometimes these shadows from the past divert churches from seeing what God wants to do today. It's true that God worded in the past, but he is alive and wants to work today also.[[322]](#footnote-374)

## Church Revitalization

According to McIntosh, there is hope for churches when they are prepared to be born again.[[323]](#footnote-375) When churches effectively relaunch, they have a new understanding of and dedication to the mission. They change their attitudes and priorities. To facilitate quick decision-making and implementation processes, they modify their organizational structure. They are open to utilizing new tools, resources, and methods of ministry. They also make it possible for outside observers to follow their development.

McIntosh asserts the fact,

Churches that have an effective and fruitful ministry for many years actually go through several cycles of birth, growth, and renewal. At each point of growth cycle, the church leaders face another choice point. Leaders who make strategic choices to renew the ministry see continuous renewal; those who do not move strategically most likely see a downturn in the ministry.[[324]](#footnote-376)

Stetzer and Dodson give a remarkable statement based upon their detail study survey on *Comeback Churches*, "...Churches desiring a comeback will need to make changes in order to start growing again."[[325]](#footnote-377) "Change requires decision making, and decision making requires action. Most churches don't make turnarounds because they never get to the action."[[326]](#footnote-378) Based upon the result of comeback surveys Stetzer and Dodson suggest a few points to revitalize the church,

Whether those changes occur through rekindling Jesus' mission for the church, mobilizing the laity, focusing on leadership development, engaging in more strategic prayer efforts, increasing evangelistic emphases, or making other needed changes, business as usual will continue to produce the same or no-growth environment that plagues the large majority of churches.[[327]](#footnote-379)

Stetzer and Dodson assert that in order to revitalize the church, the following factors need to be taken into account.[[328]](#footnote-380)

1. Rekindling the mission and vision
2. Mobilizing lay persons
3. Focusing upon leadership development
4. Engaging in strategic prayer efforts
5. Increasing evangelical emphases
6. Making necessary changes

McIntosh says, "God is in the practice of restoring, renewing, and revitalizing people and churches if they are willing to follow him and pay the price to see it happen. There is hope for your church!"[[329]](#footnote-381) McIntosh argues, "To revitalize a church, you need to know two things: where the church is and where you want it to go."[[330]](#footnote-382)

Stetzer and Rainer rightly claim, "There can be no renewal, revival, ore rebuilding without a vision for and an experience of the all-consuming, all-illuminating presence of God."[[331]](#footnote-383)

Thom Rainer recognized the causes of church stagnation in his book *Autopsy of Deceased Church*, and he offers appropriate answers for each of those causes. His observations suggest that the following factors contribute to the stagnation of the church: the church's refusal to reflect the community; the budget's inward movement; the great commission becoming the great omission; the church's preference-driven nature; the shrinking tenure of pastors; the church's infrequent gatherings for prayer; the lack of a clear mission; and the church's obsession with facilities.[[332]](#footnote-384) He claims,

Dying Churches are concerned with self-preservation. They are concerned with a certain way of doing church. They are all about self. Their doors are closed to the community. And more sadly, most of the members in the dying church would not admit they are closed to those God has called them to reach and minister.[[333]](#footnote-385)

### Way to Revitalize the Stagnant Church

Thom Rainer, in his book, *Autopsy of Deceased Church,* suggests a significant list to revive the dying churches, which are as follows:[[334]](#footnote-386)

1. Pray that God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach into the community where the church is located.
2. Take an honest audit of how church members spend their time being involved.
3. Take and audit of how the church spends its money.
4. Make specific plans to minister and evangelize your community.
5. The church must admit and confess its dire need.
6. The church must pray for wisdom and strength to do whatever is necessary.
7. The church must be willing to change radically.
8. That change must lead to action and an outward focus.

Mohler Jr. suggests, "Church Members who want to see their churches come alive again through revitalization must commit themselves to grow as Christians with other Christians through interpersonal spiritual disciplines."[[335]](#footnote-387) According to Mohler Jr., these are the spiritual disciplines:[[336]](#footnote-388)

1. Hearing the Word of God in the church.
2. Corporate worship in the church.
3. Evangelism. It brings more glory to God when we bear witness to him together than when we do so individually.
4. Serving Jesus Christ through serving in his church.
5. Giving because it fulfills the great commission, it is a form of worship, a testimony of changed life, and supports the work of the ministry.
6. Fellowship. It is the community for which God customized us.
7. Prayer in one's own life, in a small group, and in church services.

Andrew M. Davis in his book *Revitalize* suggested the following points for revitalizing the church[[337]](#footnote-389)

1. Embrace Christ’s ownership of the church.
2. Be Holy.
3. Rely on God not yourself.
4. Rely on God's Word, not on techniques.
5. Saturate the church in prayer.
6. cast a clear vision.
7. Be humble towards your opponent.
8. Be courageous.
9. Be patient.
10. Be discerning.
11. Wage war against discouragement.
12. Develop and establish Men as leaders.
13. Become supple on worship.
14. Embrace the two journeys of disciple-making.

Merrill makes a significant statement on the revitalization as follows:

growth is an indicator of revitalization among churches, but for all the aforementioned reasons, it is not the only indicator. In fact, in the context of biblical revitalization, numerical growth is the last thing that is seen, experienced and realized. Long before a church grows numerically, a culture for health and significance has been created through prayer, generosity, and the embrace of several other biblical values that build a lasting foundation for ministry.[[338]](#footnote-390)

## Cultural Factors and Church Growth in the Nepalese Context

Christianity is the new religion for Nepalese people. Hinduism, Buddhism, and other minor tribal religions have been practiced for hundreds of years. They have different traditions and practices. Many Nepalese people think that Christianity is a foreign religion. Kim states,

Christianity is recognized very differently in Nepali society compared to countries where Christianity has already established historical roots. Christianity is not respected by the major national religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. As a matter of fact, Nepali churches struggle to influence Nepali society. The church is still visibly young and weak.[[339]](#footnote-391)

Kim shows the differences between Hindu and Christian worldviews in Nepal in this way,

Hindu and Christian views differ on the nature of the human problem, and they also differ on the solution to this problem. Hindus have many paths for attaining salvation, including work ethic, mystical knowledge, meditative exercise, and devotion to deities. All the paths are valid. Some may aid one's arrival at salvation more quickly than others. Some are based on individual, save-oneself methods. Others rely on the advice and example of a guru or religious master ... In a Christian view, the solution of the human dilemma focuses on the relationship between God and the individual in the context of the gospel. The gospel is the ultimate significance and meaning in Jesus Christ and his teachings. The individual cannot solve his or her dilemma alone. God deals with human sin in the Incarnation, life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sin is forgiven through the individual's faith and acceptance of the will and love of God as demonstrated in Jesus Christ.[[340]](#footnote-392)

### Belief systems in Nepal

There are many belief systems and religions in Nepal. The major religions are Hinduism, Buddhist, and other Animist religions. There are Muslims, Christians, Jains, and other minor religions in Nepal. Hinduism, Buddhist, and Animism are the major belief systems in Nepal.

#### Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religious systems in the World. The origin of the Hindu religion started from the Indus River banks. Originally it was not a religion rather it was a culture. Later it becomes culture when the people of the Indus River spread in South and Southeast Asia. Unlike other world religions, Hinduism cannot be traced back to a particular founder.[[341]](#footnote-393) The form of Hinduism generally practiced today developed around 400–200 BCE as a reaction to this ascetic movement and in a return to the original values of the Vedas.[[342]](#footnote-394)

Nepal was known as the only Hindu Kingdom until 2006. In 2006, it became a secular country. The neighboring country India has also a large number population of Hinduism. Hinduism is one of the prominent and predominant religions in Nepal. It is just not a religion, but it is a culture. There are different sects of Hinduism. All the sects of Hinduism somehow reflect Animism. People in Nepal are deeply rooted in Hinduism and its culture. Younger generations do not care about obeying and following the orthodox Hindu system, but they are very keen to maintain their traditions. In another world, they do not care to worship gods and goddesses with full devotion, but they are always interested to maintain religious traditions and rituals. In Nepal, people have linked religion with the nationality issue. They think Christianity and Muslims are foreign religions.

Hinduism's core belief system is polytheism. Hinduism believes that there are more than 330 million gods. People worship Sun, Moon, Stars, Earth, rivers, sky, planets, plants, animals, grasses, human beings, snakes, stones, and so forth. There are many temples in Nepal. The capital city of Kathmandu is known as the city of the Temples. Sandy says,

Hindus have always believed that the totality of existence, including God, man, and the universe, is too vast to be contained within a single set of beliefs. Their religion, therefore, embraces a wide variety of metaphysical systems or viewpoints, some mutually contradictory. From these, an individual may select one which is congenial to him, or conduct his worship simply on the level of family morality and observances.[[343]](#footnote-395)

In Hinduism, there are caste systems, and every caste has different duties. There are mainly four caste groups: 1) Brahman -the priest, 2) Chhetri -the warrior 3) Vaisya -the businessman 4) Sudras -the servant. Each caste is obligated to fulfill its role. Sandy rightly says,

One basic concept in the Hindu religion is that of dharma, one's duty to follow the natural law and the social and religious obligations it imposes. It holds that every person should play his proper role in society, and the system of caste, although not essential to philosophical Hinduism, has become an integral part of its social expression.[[344]](#footnote-396)

#### Buddhism

Buddhism had its origins in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who was born about 553 BC in Lumbini. which is 250 kilometers (155 miles) southwest of Kathmandu, in the Nepali Terai.[[345]](#footnote-397) Although Buddhist religion is different from Hindu in the Nepalese context it is mixed with Hinduism. Hindus also consider Buddha as a god and the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Most Buddhists especially lower mountain people in Nepal also celebrate Hindu festivals and they also observe Hindu traditions. However, high mountain Buddhist people observe only Buddhist religious practices. Sandy summarizes the belief system of Buddhism in this way,

Gautama promulgated the four noble truths: suffering dominates life; desire causes suffering; desire comes to an end in nirvana: nirvana, perfect bliss arising out of extinction of self and absorption into the supreme spirit, can be achieved by the eightfold path. This path to nirvana is an individual struggle and results in the passing over of the individual self into the eternal self. Individual morality is the means of gaining nirvana, not the observance of caste or priestly rituals. While the concept of the union of the individual with the void as the end of existence is common to Hinduism and Buddhism, they differ on the means of achievement. Buddhist devotees have naturally been very much influenced by their contacts with their Hindu counterparts and there is a sense of unity between the two religions, even to the extent that both religions often use the same temples and worship the same divinities.[[346]](#footnote-398)

#### Animism

There are many indigenous people groups in Nepal. These indigenous people groups have different religious practices. They worship nature. Different people groups among these indigenous people group have different gods and goddesses. They worship nature because they fear it. They also worship their ancestors, and they believe that their spirits are moving around. All religions in Nepal, whether Hindu or Buddhist, are strongly influenced by the Tantric cult which infiltrated Nepal from India.[[347]](#footnote-399) In its medieval growth, Tantrism expanded the realm of the Hindu divinities and their cults and rites, adding a new element to their activities.[[348]](#footnote-400) Tantrism is an attempt to synthesize spiritualism with materialism, where practitioners seek to expand their mental faculties by mastering the forces of nature to achieve peace of mind.[[349]](#footnote-401)

#### Christianity and Other Minor Religions

Christianity is one of the fastest-growing religions in Nepal. In every region, in every tribe, in every caste, there are some Christians. The history of Christianity is no longer than 70 years. People of Nepal consider it a western religion. They even called it a foreign religion. However, a large number of indigenous peoples have become Christians in the last few decades. There are few percentages of the Muslim population. Most of them live in the Terai region. There is Jain, Shikh, Kirat, and a few other tribal religions. However, the different tribal religions and Kirat are sects of animism. The Jain, Shikh, and a few others are sects of Hinduism.

### Hindu Worldview and its Impact

The major population of Nepal believes in many gods and goddesses. Many people do not know all the names of the gods and goddesses whom they worship. While most Hindus recognize the existence and significance of many gods, no one is under any obligation to worship any particular god.[[350]](#footnote-402) They do not have an idea about whom they are worshipping and what will be the result of it. However, they worship them because they are eagerly seeking their wellness.

In the Nepalese context, the priority of people is the wellness of their lives. Many people have been suffering from poverty, health issues, and other earthly problems. So, they want to be free from pain, poverty, and other problems of life. They think that suffering has come because of their lack to please gods and goddesses. They think all the curses are coming to them because they are not worshipping gods and goddesses. So, they worship everything to please gods and goddesses. It was like Paul saw in Athens, as he says to them, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you" (Act 17:22-23 NAU). The major population of Nepal is doing the same. They even worship the idols of an unknown god.

In the Nepalese context, people easily receive Jesus as a healer and a lord. Because they love to worship different gods and goddesses. However, it is very difficult to receive that Jesus is the only Lord and He is the only way to God. It is hardest to believe that God is one and there is no other God besides the God of the Bible. When people hear this truth, they find it very difficult, and most of the time they may be seriously offended. They are very much comfortable with their gods and goddess. They fear leaving them. They want Jesus too because they want to be healed and feel peace in their heart, but they do not want Jesus at the cost of their gods and goddess.

### Christian Worldview

There is a different definition of worldviews. Spiegel and Cowan define the worldview in this way, "A worldview is a conceptual scheme or intellectual framework by which a person organizes and interprets experience. More specifically, a worldview is a set of beliefs, values, and presuppositions concerning life's most fundamental issues."[[351]](#footnote-403) Anderson, Clark, and Naugle define it in this way,

Thus, we believe that our worldview—conscious or not, consistent or not—answers four fundamental questions (actually, four sets of questions) about life, the universe, and everything. Each question (or set of questions) has multiple possible answers that can be given in the form of stories or propositions; together, the answers compose a comprehensive view of reality."[[352]](#footnote-404)

To defend the Christian faith, the defender needs to be aware Christian worldview. In their book, "*To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*", Anderson, Clark, and Naugle point the view about a Christian worldview as follows:

The Christian worldview centers on Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man who was born over two thousand years ago in a humble stable in Bethlehem, lived a perfectly sinless life, was crucified on a Roman cross, and was raised from the dead in Jerusalem. We, as Christians, have embraced Jesus as Messiah and Lord. He has redeemed us, provided for us, and loved us constantly despite our flaws and failures. It is to him, and to his glory, that this book is both dedicated and devoted.[[353]](#footnote-405)

The Christian worldview centers on Christ and His redemptive work. It believes in One true Triune Creator God, who loves the world so much that He gave his only Son for the world to save them.

The Christian worldview is a transforming worldview. It is just not a mere set of thoughts that do nothing. It transforms people's lives. It impacted people's lives throughout history. Hibert rightly says,

As Christians we are concerned not with conversion in general but with conversion to Jesus, and not to Jesus as a good man but to the Jesus of the Bible—the Christ, the Son of God, who became flesh, died, and rose to save people from their sins... Conversion is far more than an emotional release and far more than an intellectual adherence to correct doctrine. It is a basic change in life direction.[[354]](#footnote-406)

If there is no transformation of life it becomes only a new sect of religion. In Nepal, there are many religious groups inside Hinduism. If there is no transformation, the people of Nepal may think that it is a part of the Hindu sect. Hibert clearly says,

Conversion to Christ must encompass all three levels of culture: behavior and rituals, beliefs, and worldview. Christians should live differently because they are Christians. However, if their behavior is based primarily on their culture, it becomes dead tradition. Conversion must involve a transformation in beliefs, but if it is only a change of beliefs, it is false faith. Although conversion must include a change in behavior and beliefs, if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and becomes captive to the local culture. The result is syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form but not the essence of Christianity. Christianity becomes a new magic and a new, more subtle form of idolatry.[[355]](#footnote-407)

### Apologetics in Nepalese Context

Apologetics is the task of giving a reasoned defense of Christian theism in light of objections raised against it and of offering positive evidence on its behalf.[[356]](#footnote-408) Every people group in the world needs some degree of Apologetics to receive Christ. Nepalese people need Salvation. The number of believers is only a few percent. The major population holds Hinduism. To reach them with the Gospel, there is a great need for apologetics. The Bible also commands us to do so. "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1Pe 3:15 ESV).

#### Christian Apologetics

The word *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which can be translated as “defense” or “vindication.”[[357]](#footnote-409) Groothuis says, "Christian apologetics is the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging."[[358]](#footnote-410) He rightly says, *"Christian Apologetics* begins by laying out the biblical case for apologetics and the apologetic method necessary for defending the faith. That faith (i.e., the Christian worldview) is then explained and defended against various false charges."[[359]](#footnote-411)

Groothuis points out the three challenges for Christian apologetics in this way: "the challenge of religious pluralism (Christianity cannot be the only way, given so many religions), the resurgence of Islam and its claims to be the one true religion, and the problem of evil (God cannot be all-good and all-powerful, given the evils of the world)."[[360]](#footnote-412)

Christian theology and apologetics have a close relationship. Apologetics is a part of the Christian faith. Craig draws the close connection this way:

Apologetics is that branch of Christian theology that seeks to provide a rational warrant for Christianity's truth claims. It contains offensive and defensive elements, on the one hand presenting positive arguments for Christian truth claims and on the other refuting objections brought against Christianity's truth claims.[[361]](#footnote-413)

Howe and Howe summarize the Christian worldview in this way:

Christianity claims that there is a God who is the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe and to whom every person will have to give an account one day. Christianity claims that Jesus Christ lived a life of miracles, was crucified and rose from the dead. These claims are such that they can be investigated philosophically, scientifically and historically. These claims are such that philosophical, scientific and historical evidence can be marshaled to support them. These claims are such that they can he reasoned about. We see that this is the case not only because of the nature of the claims themselves but also because that is what the Bible says about them and that is how the apostles treated them.[[362]](#footnote-414)

However, Christian Worldview has been under attack throughout history by different people, leaders, governments, systems, and so forth. From the beginning of the Church, oppositions persecuted believers because of their faith and belief system. Many Christians were martyred from the beginning, and it is continued till today. Nepal is no exception. Opposition worldviews are always there to attack the Christian Worldview. Toren Rightly says that "From the beginning of the modern era until recently, the Christian faith has been under heavy attack for being backward, obscurantist, non-scientific and not in accordance with right reason."[[363]](#footnote-415) He further says,

Christian apologetics was heavily involved in the defense of the truth and rationality of the Christian faith. Nowadays the opposition from science still has some sort of plausibility, but generally all sorts of religious beliefs can count on a new openness and tolerance. This gives the Christian faith a host of new opportunities and, equally, new challenges.[[364]](#footnote-416)

#### Christianity in Culture

Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations. He said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mar 16:15 ESV). All the world includes all the people of the world of all ages, nations, people groups, worldviews, culture, age, gender, and so forth. There is a deep relation between worldview and culture. Kraft rightly says,

Humans are understood to be totally, inextricably immersed in culture. Each human individual is born into a particular sociocultural context. From that point on persons are conditioned by the members of their society in countless, largely unconscious, ways to accept as natural and to follow rather uncritically the cultural patterns of that society.[[365]](#footnote-417)

He also says, "Our mental behavior is likewise pervasively influenced by the cultural patterns we have been taught."[[366]](#footnote-418) Indeed, society's pattern and culture shape the worldview of people within it. Kraft confirms this by saying,

Societies pattern perceptions of reality into conceptualizations of what reality can or should be, what is to be regarded as actual, probable, possible, and impossible. These conceptualizations form what is termed the “worldview” of any given culture. The worldview is the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of the society assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system. The worldview lies at the very heart of culture, touching, interacting with, and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture.[[367]](#footnote-419)

#### Contextualizing the Faith

In the Bible, we can see Paul's different ways to approach the Gospel to the different people group. In his letter to Corinthians, he says,

To the Jews, I became as a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means, I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." (1Co 9:20-23 ESV).

So, contextualization is an important aspect to approach the Gospel effectively. Moreau says,

Contextualization refers to how those people live out their faith in light of the values of their societies. It is not limited to theology, architecture, church polity, ritual, training, art, or spiritual experience: it includes them all and more.[[368]](#footnote-420)

He further asserts,

Contextualization includes every way we express our faith in Christ including (1) the doctrinal or philosophical, (2) the ritual, (3) the mythic or narrative, (4) the experiential and emotional, (5) the ethical and legal, (6) the social, and (7) the material dimensions.[[369]](#footnote-421)

He rightly says about the need for contextualization in this way,

The gospel is indeed universally relevant and understandable, but if I do not contextualize how I communicate it, recipients will not understand it or its relevance to them and their people. ... we contextualize not only how we communicate the gospel but also the churches we plant (or join), the ministry practices we engage in, the ethical stances we take, the art we produce, the theology we develop, the systems of exchange, learning, and organization we use, and so on. If we don’t contextualize, our churches and Christian organizations will look not only generically foreign, but also foreign in a particular way—whether that be too American, too Korean, or too Brazilian.[[370]](#footnote-422)

Contextualization is important in Nepal. Gospel will not be effective if it is not shared in a local context.

#### Doing Philosophy as a Christian

People in Nepal have different worldviews. They have different belief systems. Christians are living in the Nepalese society where their neighbors have different beliefs. Corduan feels the urgency to understand the neighboring people's beliefs so that a Christian can defend his faith plausibly. He says,

Christians must learn to live in a world of religious plurality. Christians desiring contact with neighbors who belong to a different religion need information regarding their food preferences, holidays, religious customs and symbols, and—above all—beliefs about the central reason for human existence.[[371]](#footnote-423)

Nepal used to be the only Hindu Kingdom until 2005. Still, the major religion is Hinduism. Major people in Nepal observe the Hindu religion. Nepalese Hinduism holds a polytheistic worldview. However, there are many sects of Hinduism. Corduan elaborates it in this way,

Focusing on the religions of Asia, we see that the precursor of Hinduism, the religion of the prehistoric Aryans, may have had some monotheistic roots. Hinduism provides an ongoing demonstration of how much variety a religion can accommodate. Even belief systems that are now considered religions in their own right, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, are direct outgrowths of the Hindu heritage.[[372]](#footnote-424)

## Role of Migration in the Church Growth Movement

God is on the move. People in the diaspora are more open to the Gospel than in their homeland. When people are in their homeland, eventually they become territorial. Territorial mindsets and spirits will start to work in their life. They become more defensive. They want to preserve their tradition, religion, language, land, and principles. They want to become idle on their land. The idle does not move and does not change. Because of an idle mindset, people are not open to the Gospel in their homeland. Sometimes, territorial spirits may prevent them to open their ear to hear the Gospel. When people move from their place, they will be open to new things. In the Nepalese context, people are religious. They worship many gods and goddesses. They have territorial idle gods and goddesses. They worship them regularly hoping for wellness in their life. They worship idles out of fear. When people migrate to other places, they seek gods and goddesses to worship. However, they will not find their territorial idle there. They look for gods and goddesses in a foreign land. In the quest and dilemma, if they hear the Gospel, they will open to it. Nepalese have been starting to migrate as a labor force to Gulf and Southeast Asian countries since the 1990s. Since then, the growth of Nepalese Christianity has become significant. Many Nepalese young people came to Christ in the diaspora. When they came back to the homeland as a missionary of the Gospel. Hindu people from India and Nepal are the people who live in the 10-40 window. They were not open to the Gospel until they started to migrate. Crossing the Kalapani (black seawater) was prohibited in Hindu culture. In Hindu culture, their birthplace is so important therefore they hesitate to travel. I learn that people are more defensive of the Gospel in their homeland and birthplace. People are more open to the Gospel when they are in the diaspora. This is also true for other migrants from different nations in different countries. It is a blessing to know migrant people from the Gulf countries and North African countries are coming to Christ in Europe. Nepalese are coming to Christ in Gulf countries, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, and so forth. The harvest is full in the diaspora.

Today, diaspora missiology is an important topic in the global church. The role and importance of diaspora in God’s mission are becoming vital today. The book Scattered to Gathered is a very good book to see the mission from diasporic lances. it rightly says, “to disperse the people was God’s purpose since the beginning (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).”[[373]](#footnote-425) It also says,

"God has always moved His people in “diasporas” by His sovereignty will. Some “diasporas” happened due to man’s sinful behavior, e.g. curse of Cain (Genesis 4:12-16); ... Other cases of “diaspora” happened as the Lord determined and used circumstances to bless His people (Abraham in Canaan— Gen. 12:1-6; Joseph and Jacob’s family going down to Egypt – Psalm 80:1; 81:5; 105:17)."[[374]](#footnote-426)

As we read the bible through the diasporic lenses, we see things differently. We see the importance of the diaspora in the mission from the creation to redemption, as the book says, "Since the creation of the world, therefore, till today, diasporas have been an indispensable means by which God has accomplished his redemptive purposes through Jesus Christ."[[375]](#footnote-427) It is true that "Diaspora — a missional means decreed and blessed by God (Genesis 1:28; 9:1; 12:3; 28:14) under His sovereign rule to promote the expansion of His Kingdom and the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 24:14; 28:17-20)."[[376]](#footnote-428) As it was important in the past it is also important in the present situation where many people are migrating in the world. It rightly says, " 'Diaspora missions' is the practicing of Christian missions in the 21st Century creatively in accordance to the socio-cultural changes (of globalization, urbanization, and demographic shift) by missions to the diasporas and through the diasporas to accomplish the Great Commission.”[[377]](#footnote-429)

Indeed “diaspora missiology” - is a new strategy for missions. The Diaspora mission is a providential and strategic way to minister to “the nations” by the diaspora and through the diaspora.[[378]](#footnote-430) When God is moving the diasporas geographically making them accessible, the Church should not miss any opportunity to reach them with the gospel, i.e. “missions to the diasporas.”[[379]](#footnote-431) Global demographic trends of diasporas created new opportunities and great potential for partnership between the evangelical churches and denominations in the industrial West and different evangelical groups in the diaspora.[[380]](#footnote-432)

### Migration and the World Christianity

Migration is one of the important topics in human history. History tells that there were many migrations had happened. In the present situation, there are many migrations movements occurring. It will also happen in the future. Jehu J. Hanciles in his book *Migration and Making Global Christianity* has contributed very good insights, as he says, "Human migration is a fact of history; and the history of humans is one of migration. In a quite literal sense, 'humans are born migration'."[[381]](#footnote-433) World's major religions: Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are spread throughout the world massively because of migration.[[382]](#footnote-434) The Bible is filled with full of stories about migrations. Dispersion all over the earth is God's original intention for human beings. Human beings are created to be His image-bearer to the whole earth. The idea of building the tower of Babel was the idea of anti-migration. It is the opposite idea of God's original idea.[[383]](#footnote-435) They try to build the city and the tower to challenge God's supremacy; gain fame; crave a destiny apart from God. So, God intervened to disperse them by multiplying the languages. Human migration contributed to spread the of religion and culture throughout the world.[[384]](#footnote-436) When people migrate to a new place, they bring their own culture and religion with them. Jehu rightly says, "the mission of God starts on the margin. Migrants are the most marginal people in the world. In sociological terms, margins signify the vulnerability, powerlessness, and otherness instructed to migration and migrant existence."[[385]](#footnote-437) It was true in the first century CE and true in the 21st century CE. In the Nepalese context, the Gospel spread rapidly among the Nepalese people when they migrated to a different country. Many people came to Christ when they migrated as labor migrants in Malaysia and Gulf countries in the last two decades. When they came back to Nepal, they shared the Gospel with their families, relatives, and friends. The same thing is true for internal migrants. People who migrated to towns from the villages are the most receptive people to the Gospel. Migration is not a comfortable thing for human beings. It hurts. It brings challenges. It brings uncertainty. God is in control. People are more open to the Gospel when they are vulnerable. So, the migration has a huge role to expand the kingdom of God.

### Scattered and Gather Nepalese People

God is working among the migrant people in the world. The term for scatter in the bible is *diaspora* and for the gather is *ecclesia*. As there is important to gather in His name, it is also important to scatter to expand His name. Tira and Darrell say in this way,

Diaspora in the mission was defined by them as “dispersed ethnic groups who are actively engaged or actively involved in fulfilling the Great Commission; regardless of vocation and denominational affiliations of individuals involved.” Diaspora missiology was consequently defined as “a missiological study of the phenomena of diaspora groups being scattered geographically and the strategy of gathering for the kingdom.[[386]](#footnote-438)

Now, most of the middle-class and higher-middle-class Nepalese youths are migrating to Australia, the US, and Europe to pursue a better life and carrier. More than four million Nepalese youths are working as migrant workers in the middle east and Malaysia. God's work is faster in the migrants. God himself causes people to move from place to place. The Bible is full of the story of migrating people. God works among the scattered people to gather in His name. God is at work. God is working among the people in the diaspora. People's hearts are more open to the Gospel when they are far from their birthplace, culture, religion, relatives, and so forth. Whatever the reasons and causes behind the migration, God is in control. He is sovereign. People are coming to Christ through diaspora missions.

Start here. Each page that begins a chapter has the chapter number 2 inches (5 cm) from the top margin, one line space, and then its title below it. Leave two single-spaced lines between the title and the first line of text.

The second paragraph is also indented by half an inch (1.25 cm). The numbering for the first page in every new section or chapter is an Arabic numeral centered at the bottom of the page, followed by page numbers at the top right corner for succeeding pages.

## Heading 2

The regular text here follows a *headline-style* Heading 2 in **bold** (see 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

### Heading 3

The regular text here follows a *headline-style* Heading 3 in regular text (see 3.4.2 on page 19 and 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

#### Heading 4

The regular text here follows the *sentence-style* ***Heading 4*** ***format*** ***in*** ***italicized bold*** text (see 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

##### Heading 5

The regular text here follows a *sentence-style* Heading 5 in regular text (see 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

###### Heading 6. The first sentence follows on the same line but in regular text. A blank line also precedes Heading 6, but the title of Heading 6 appears in *sentence-style* bold text with a period (see 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393) and then the paragraph follows immediately after the title on the same line in regular text.

## Heading 2

The regular text here follows a *headline-style* main Heading 2 in **bold** (see 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

## Heading 2

The regular text here follows a *headline-style* main Heading 2 in **bold** (see 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

Never type anything below this line, where the Section Break (Odd) Page is.

# Chapter 4 Results and Recommendations

Start here. Each page that begins a chapter has the chapter number 2 inches (5 cm) from the top margin, one line space, and then its title below it. Leave two single-spaced lines between the title and the first line of text.

The second paragraph is also indented by half an inch (1.25 cm). The numbering for the first page in every new section or chapter is an Arabic numeral centered at the bottom of the page, followed by page numbers at the top right corner for succeeding pages.

## Heading 2

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Never type anything below this line, where the Section Break (Odd) Page is.

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# Conclusion

Start here. The conclusion should be a separate section that forms the final part of the dissertation before the Bibliography unless you also have an appendix or appendixes. In that case, the order will be Conclusion, Appendixes, Bibliography, and Vita (remember the acronym CABV). Make sure not to add new material to the conclusion as it should sum up your arguments and convincingly bring forth your thesis, including recommendations on what people should do to apply your research. It is a good habit to read your introduction that promises certain things in your paper and then make sure that your conclusion delivers what your introduction promises. Also, typically the Conclusion will not go beyond Heading 3 so the other headings are not pasted below. Finally, typically the Conclusion will be about 3-10 pages long and include a section on the limitations of the research and a section on potential further research topics for future dissertations.

The second paragraph is also indented by half an inch (1.25 cm) and the numbering is an Arabic number centered at the bottom of the page.

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## Heading 2

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### Heading 3

The regular text here follows a *headline-style* Heading 3 in regular text (see 3.4.2 on page 19 and 3.5.9 on page 22 and Turabian, 393).

Never type anything below this line, where the Section Break (Odd) Page is.

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# Appendix 1 Participant Information & Consent Form

**Instructions for Students**

1. In compliance with the Personal Data Protection Act of Singapore and the ethics of research on human subjects, all DMin students who are collecting data from people (e.g., survey, interview) for their research must obtain written permission from all participants to use the data contributed by them. Within sensitive regions where it is unsafe for the participant to give written consent, oral consent will be sufficient.
2. Students will need to indicate such consent in their dissertation. Dissertations that do not comply with this requirement will not be accepted for the oral defence.
3. After obtaining the signed consent from each participant, students will need to inform the DMin director and the DMin Office by email that they have complied with getting the consent forms signed by participants.
4. Students are to ensure that participants read and understand the “Participant Information and Consent Form.” Signed consent forms are to be kept by students for a period of 7–8 years after the research.

**Participant Information & Consent Form**

**Singapore Bible College**

**Title of Research Project: Key Factors for Church Growth or Stagnation of Ten NIM Churches**

**Name of Student Researcher: Lekh Nath Poudel**

**Name of Research Mentor: Dr. Alvin Tan**

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, you must understand the reasons behind the research and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends and relatives if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

**Purpose of the research**: The purpose of this research is to find out the key factors of church growth or stagnation of ten NIM churches to keep the church growth momentum.

**Why have I been chosen to take part?** The researcher is in charge of Missions and Outreach among the NIM churches, and your input helps him help your church move forward in both missions and outreach.

**Do I have to take part?** No. You are free to decline to participate in the study.

**What will happen if I take part?** If you agree to participate, then we will arrange for you to meet the researcher for an in-depth interview regarding your experiences. This interview will take place either in your own home or at Singapore Bible College. The interview will likely last 30 to 90 minutes. The interviewer will ask a range of different questions about your experiences. It will help to expand the mission and outreach work of NIM Churches.

**Are there any risks in taking part?** There are minimal risks to taking part in the research. Some questions could be upsetting, but you will be free to refuse to answer any questions causing discomfort. You can also stop the interview at any time.

**Are there any benefits to taking part?** The benefits arising from your participation in the research will include valuable data and perspectives for the students and their ministries in furthering the gospel.

**What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?** If you are unhappy with how the researcher conducted any segment of the research, you are free to email [dmin@sbc.edu.sg](mailto:dmin@sbc.edu.sg) to raise your concerns.

**Will my participation be kept confidential?** Your participation will be kept entirely confidential. The researcher will use another name (not your real name) in the dissertation, and the researcher will also ensure to omit any facts or information that could reveal your identity in published material.

**What will happen to the results of the study?** The research information collected by the DMin student will be used solely for his/her dissertation research matters.

**Who can I contact if I have further questions?** Please feel free to contact the student by email (lekhnp@sbc.edu.sg) or by telephone (+977-9840052842) if you would like any additional information about the study and your participation.

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project: Key Factors for Church Growth or Stagnation of Ten NIM Churches.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Initial each box** |
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated [DATE] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily. | |  |
| 1. I understand that my participation is voluntary. | |  |
| 1. I understand that I can, at any time, ask for access to the information I provide. | |  |
| 1. I agree to take part in the above study. | |  |
| 1. I understand and agree that my participation may be audio recorded. I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings to reproduce direct anonymized quotes for the dissertation. | |  |
| 1. I certify that the information given by me in this study is true and complete. I give permission and authorize the student to collect, use, and disclose my data to the SBC DMin department for this research. | |  |

Participant Name Date Signature

Student Researcher Name Date Signature

Lekh Nath Poudel

Singapore Bible College

9-15 Adam Road

Singapore 289886

lekhnp@sbc.edu.sg

# 

# Appendix 2 Interviews with Senior Pastors/Lay Leaders

**Open-Ended Questions**

1. What are the key contributing factors to church growth among the NIM churches that we need to emphasize to help churches thrive?
2. What are the key contributing factors to church growth?
3. What are the hindrances for church growth?
4. Who is/are the main contributor for church growth: key pastor or leader/lay leader/believers? Why?
5. Who is/are the responsible the church stagnancy: key pastor or leader/ lay leaders/ believers? Why?
6. What emphases does the church need to embrace to keep thriving?

# Appendix 3 A Questionnaire for Believers

**Close-Ended Questions**

Personal Information:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Church name:
5. Address:
6. Phone number:
7. Educational qualifications:

Please circle one from the following options:

1. How did you come to faith?
   1. Personal healing and deliverance
   2. Healing and deliverance of family members
   3. My family was Christian
   4. I heard the gospel, and I believed
   5. I was looking for peace
   6. I desired salvation
   7. I read the Bible or gospel literature
   8. Other (Please mention):
2. How long have you been a Christian believer?
3. 0-12 months
4. 1-5 years
5. 6-9 years
6. 10-15 years
7. 15 years or more
8. How do you define discipleship?
   1. It is the process of becoming more like Jesus
   2. It is accepting Jesus as Lord
   3. Preaching the gospel
   4. It is pursuing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, giving tithes and offerings, fasting
   5. It is regular Saturday church attendance
9. There are organized discipleship programs in your church.
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Agree
   3. Somewhat agree
   4. Disagree
   5. Strongly disagree
10. How many discipleship programs have you attended since your conversion to Christ?
    1. I do not know
    2. 1-5
    3. 6-10
    4. 11 or more
11. How is your church growing in terms of numbers?
    1. Growing significantly
    2. Growing slowly
    3. Growth is stagnant
    4. Growth is declining
12. If the church is growing, what are the key factors of growth? (Please circle the top five reasons.)
    1. Gospel preaching
    2. Discipleship & caring
    3. Good testimonies
    4. Healing and deliverance
    5. Prayer and fasting
    6. Social service
    7. Committed believers
    8. Vision, mission, and goals
    9. Leadership
    10. Unity
13. If the church is not growing, is stagnant, or declining, what are the key factors? (Please circle the top five reasons.)
    1. Leadership crisis
    2. Bad testimonies
    3. Lack of good faith in believers
    4. Lack of unity
    5. Lack of prayer
    6. Lack of gospel preaching
    7. Lack of sound teaching and training
    8. Lack of discipleship and caring
    9. Lack of vision, mission, and goals
    10. False teaching and persecutions
14. Which are the areas the church needs to consider for church growth? (Please circle the top five areas.)
    1. Gospel preaching
    2. Discipleship and caring
    3. Prayer and fasting
    4. Social service
    5. Vision, mission, and goals
    6. Leadership training and development program
    7. Maintaining good testimonies
    8. Well-functioning weekly church service
    9. Healing, deliverance, and miracles
    10. Unity
    11. Other:

# Appendix 4 A Questionnaire for Lay Leaders

**Close-Ended Questions**

Personal Information:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Church name:
5. Address:
6. Phone number:
7. Educational qualifications:

Please circle one from the following options:

1. How did you come to faith?
2. Personal healing and deliverance
3. Healing and deliverance of family members
4. My family was Christian
5. I heard the gospel, and I believed
6. I was looking for peace
7. I desired salvation
8. I read the Bible or gospel literature
9. Other (Please mention):
10. How long have you been a Christian believer?
11. 0-12 months
12. 1-5 years
13. 6-9 years
14. 10-15 years
15. 15 years or more
16. How do you define discipleship?
17. It is accepting Jesus as Lord
18. Preaching the gospel
19. It is the process of becoming more like Jesus
20. It is pursuing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, giving tithes and offerings, fasting
21. It is regular Saturday church attendance
22. There are organized discipleship programs in your church.
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Somewhat agree
    4. Disagree
    5. Strongly disagree
23. How many discipleship programs have you attended since your conversion to Christ?
24. I do not know
25. 1-4
26. 5-8
27. Nine or more
28. What kind of ministry role do you hold in your church? (Please circle your prominent role.)
29. Pastor or elder
30. Deacon, administrator, or full-time church staff
31. Children’s minister
32. Youth minister
33. Cell group leader or co-leader
34. Worship team leader
35. Other (please mention):
36. How many years have you held this ministry role?
37. 0-12 months
38. 1-5 years
39. 6-10 years
40. More than ten years
41. You have received proper training for your ministry role.
42. Strongly agree
43. Agree
44. Somewhat agree
45. Disagree
46. Strongly disagree
47. There are regular leadership training and development programs in your church.
48. Strongly agree
49. Agree
50. Somewhat agree
51. Disagree
52. Strongly disagree
53. You have the opportunity to go outside your church to receive leadership training.
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Somewhat agree
    4. Disagree
    5. Strongly disagree
54. Describe your training experience:
    1. Non-formal (2-7 days training)
    2. Basic (2-5 months training)
    3. Certificate level (6-12 months training)
    4. Diploma level (1-2 years)
    5. Bachelor level (B.Th. or equivalent)
    6. Masters level (MDiv or equivalent)
55. What was/is the size of your church? Please mention the number of believers)
56. When it started, started year:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_size:
57. 16 years ago:
58. 12 years ago:
59. Eight years ago:
60. Four years ago:
61. Current size:
62. What is the number of believers in your church by their gender and age? (Please mention the number)
    1. Children (0-15 years) male, female:
    2. Youth (age 15-24 years) male, female:
    3. Young adult (age 25-40 years) male:
    4. Young adult (age 25-40 years) female:
    5. Adult (above 40 years) male:
    6. Adult (above 40 years) female:
63. How is your church growing in terms of numbers?
64. Growing significantly
65. Growing slowly
66. Growth is stagnant
67. Growth is declining
68. If the church is growing, what are the key factors of growth? (Please circle the top five reasons.)
69. Good testimonies
70. Healing and deliverance
71. Prayer and fasting
72. Gospel preaching
73. Discipleship & caring
74. Social service
75. Committed believers
76. Vision, mission, and goals
77. Leadership
78. Unity
79. If the church is not growing, is stagnant, or declining, what are the key factors? (Please circle the top five reasons.)
80. Leadership crisis
81. Bad testimonies
82. Lack of good faith in believers
83. Lack of unity
84. Lack of prayer
85. Lack of gospel preaching
86. Lack of sound teaching and training
87. Lack of discipleship and caring
88. Lack of vision, mission, and goals
89. False teaching and persecutions
90. Which are the areas the church needs to consider for church growth? (Please circle the top five areas.)
91. Gospel preaching
92. Social service
93. Vision, mission, and goals
94. Leadership training and development program
95. Discipleship and caring
96. Prayer and fasting
97. Maintaining good testimonies
98. Well-functioning weekly church service
99. Healing, deliverance, and miracles
100. Unity
101. Other:
102. How many branch churches has your church established? (Please circle one.)
103. none
104. 1-3
105. 4-6
106. 7-9
107. Ten or more
108. How many missionaries or mission workers has your church sent? (Please circle one.)
109. none
110. 0-3
111. 4-6
112. 7-9
113. Ten or more
114. List the names and sizes of your branch churches.
115. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
116. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
117. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
118. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
119. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
120. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
121. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
122. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
123. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
124. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
125. Please add more if needed:
126. Please tick yes or no
127. Is there any mentor (like Paul) in your life? Yes/No
128. Is there any mentee (like Timothy) in your life? Yes/No
129. Is there any companion (like Barnabas) in your life to support your spiritual life? Yes/No

# Appendix 5 A Questionnaire for Senior Pastors

**Close-Ended Questions**

Personal Information:

1. Name:

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Church name:
4. Address:
5. Phone number:
6. Educational qualifications:

Please circle one from the following options:

1. How did you come to faith?
2. Personal healing and deliverance
3. Healing and deliverance of family members
4. My family was Christian
5. I heard the gospel, and I believed
6. I was looking for peace
7. I desired salvation
8. I read the Bible or gospel literature
9. Other (Please mention):
10. How long have you been a Christian believer?
11. 0-12 months
12. 1-5 years
13. 6-9 years
14. 10-15 years
15. 15 years or more
16. How do you define discipleship?
17. It is accepting Jesus as Lord
18. Preaching the gospel
19. It is the process of becoming more like Jesus
20. It is pursuing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, giving tithes and offerings, fasting
21. It is regular Saturday church attendance
22. There are organized discipleship programs in your church.
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Somewhat agree
    4. Disagree
    5. Strongly disagree
23. How many discipleship programs have you attended since your conversion to Christ?
24. I do not know
25. 1-4
26. 5-8
27. Nine or more
28. What kind of ministry role do you hold in your church? (Please circle your prominent role.)
29. Pastor or elder
30. Deacon, administrator, or full-time church staff
31. Children’s minister
32. Youth minister
33. Cell group leader or co-leader
34. Worship team leader
35. Other (please mention):
36. How many years have you held this ministry role?
37. 0-12 months
38. 1-5 years
39. 6-10 years
40. More than ten years
41. You have received proper training for your ministry role.
42. Strongly agree
43. Agree
44. Somewhat agree
45. Disagree
46. Strongly disagree
47. There are regular leadership training and development programs in your church.
48. Strongly agree
49. Agree
50. Somewhat agree
51. Disagree
52. Strongly disagree
53. You have the opportunity to go outside your church to receive leadership training.
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Somewhat agree
    4. Disagree
    5. Strongly disagree
54. Describe your training experience:
    1. Non-formal (2-7 days training)
    2. Basic (2-5 months training)
    3. Certificate level (6-12 months training)
    4. Diploma level (1-2 years)
    5. Bachelor level (B.Th. or equivalent)
    6. Masters level (MDiv or equivalent)
55. What was/is the size of your church? Please mention the number of believers)
56. When it started, started year:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_size:
57. 16 years ago:
58. 12 years ago:
59. Eight years ago:
60. Four years ago:
61. Current size:
62. What is the number of believers in your church by their gender and age? (Please mention the number)
    1. Children (0-15 years) male, female:
    2. Youth (age 15-24 years) male, female:
    3. Young adult (age 25-40 years) male:
    4. Young adult (age 25-40 years) female:
    5. Adult (above 40 years) male:
    6. Adult (above 40 years) female:
63. How is your church growing in terms of numbers?
64. Growing significantly
65. Growing slowly
66. Growth is stagnant
67. Growth is declining
68. If the church is growing, what are the key factors of growth? (Please circle the top five reasons.)
69. Good testimonies
70. Healing and deliverance
71. Prayer and fasting
72. Social service
73. Gospel preaching
74. Discipleship & caring
75. Committed believers
76. Vision, mission, and goals
77. Leadership
78. Unity
79. If the church is not growing, is stagnant, or declining, what are the key factors? (Please circle the top five reasons.)
80. Leadership crisis
81. Bad testimonies
82. Lack of good faith in believers
83. Lack of unity
84. Lack of prayer
85. Lack of gospel preaching
86. Lack of sound teaching and training
87. Lack of discipleship and caring
88. Lack of vision, mission, and goals
89. False teaching and persecutions
90. Which are the areas the church needs to consider for church growth? (Please circle the top five areas.)
91. Prayer and fasting
92. Social service
93. Vision, mission, and goals
94. Leadership training and development program
95. Maintaining good testimonies
96. Gospel preaching
97. Discipleship and caring
98. Well-functioning weekly church service
99. Healing, deliverance, and miracles
100. Unity
101. Other:
102. How many branch churches has your church established? (Please circle one.)
103. none
104. 1-3
105. 4-6
106. 7-9
107. Ten or more
108. How many missionaries or mission workers has your church sent? (Please circle one.)
109. none
110. 0-3
111. 4-6
112. 7-9
113. Ten or more
114. List the names and sizes of your branch churches.
115. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
116. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
117. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
118. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
119. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
120. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
121. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
122. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
123. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
124. Branch church (name: ), Established Date: church attendees:
125. Please add more if needed:
126. Please tick yes or no
127. Is there any mentor (like Paul) in your life? Yes/No
128. Is there any mentee (like Timothy) in your life? Yes/No
129. Is there any companion (like Barnabas) in your life to support your spiritual life? Yes/No
130. Evaluate yourself and give the score (adapted from ©2012 by Gordon E. Penfold and Aubrey Malphurs)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S.N. | Statement | True  (1) | More True than False  (2) | More False than True  (3) | False  (4) |
| 1. | I am more a leader than a manager/administrator | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | I have a clear, compelling picture/vision of where I want to see our church in the next five to ten years. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. | I am more innovative than traditional. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. | I am outgoing (an extrovert). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. | I have above-average people skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. | I am very energetic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. | When it comes to ministry, I am a contemporary thinker, regardless of my age. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. | I prefer to work with a team as opposed to working alone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. | I am a delegator. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. | People say that I am an inspiring preacher and communicator. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. | I have exerted a strong influence in the church I pastor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. | I am reasonably quick to embrace change/innovation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. | I am good at resolving conflicts. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. | I am good at solving problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. | People say that I am an inspiring, visionary leader. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. | People view me as a more directive than a passive type of leader. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. | I passionately communicate our vision. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. | I am good at developing new leadership. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. | I empower people to use their giftedness in ministry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. | I am a self-starter. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. | Strong (Personal) relationships are important to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. | I have had (in the past) a mentor or coach in my life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. | I currently (in the past year) have a mentor or coach in my life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. | I am effective at leading various generations (young and old) through change. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. | I am prepared to pay the price to lead to change. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 26. | I have led a declining or plateaued church to turn around and grow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|  | The total score for each column (boxes checked times the column value (1-4) |  |  |  |  |

Your Total Score:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 6 Findings of Pilot Pilot Project

## Findings from the Questionnaire

After receiving the questionnaire, the researcher recorded all the data in Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word. With the help of Microsoft Excel, the researcher summarized all the data and put it into the table forms. Following are the findings of the study:

Table . The ways people come to faith in Christ

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The ways people come to faith in Christ | No. of People | Percentage |
| Personal healing and deliverance | 7 | 25% |
| Healing and deliverance of family members | 10 | 36% |
| My family was Christian | 4 | 14% |
| I heard the gospel, and I believed | 5 | 18% |
| I was looking for peace | 1 | 3.5% |
| I desired salvation | 1 | 3.5% |
| I read the Bible or gospel literature | 0 | 0% |
| Other (Please mention): | 0 | 0% |
| Total | **28** | **100%** |

About 61% of people out of 28 people are coming to faith either by their healing or their family members’ healing. About 14% came to faith because of their families’ faith. Only 25% of people came to faith for other reasons.

Table . Duration of been a Christian believer

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Duration | No. of Believers |
| 0-12 months | 1 |
| 1-5 years | 3 |
| 6-9 years | 4 |
| 10-15 years | 7 |
| 15 years or more | 13 |
| Total | **28** |

Table . Definition of discipleship

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Definition of discipleship | No. | Percentage |
| It is the process of becoming more like Jesus | 19 | 68% |
| It is accepting Jesus as Lord | 3 | 11% |
| Preaching the gospel | 3 | 11% |
| It is pursuing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, giving tithes and offerings, fasting | 3 | 11% |
| It is regular Saturday church attendance | 0 | 0% |
| Total | **28** | **100%** |

More than two-thirds of people agreed that the definition of discipleship is the process of becoming more like Jesus.

Table . Organized discipleship program in the church

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| There are organized discipleship programs | Church G1 | Church G2 | Church S1 | Church S2 |
| Strongly Agree | 1 (14%) | - | - | - |
| Agree | 6 (86%) | 7 (100%) | 2 (29%) | - |
| Somewhat Agree | - | - | 5 (71%) | 7 (100%) |
| Disagree | - | - | - | - |
| Strongly Disagree | - | - | - | - |
| Total | **7 (100%)** | **7 (100%)** | **7 (100%)** | **7 (100%)** |

The growing churches have a more organized discipleship program than stagnant churches.

Table . Attended discipleship programs in the church

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Attended discipleship programs | Church G1 | Church G2 | Church S1 | Church S2 |
| Strongly Agree | 2 (29%) | 1 (14%) |  |  |
| Agree | 2 (29%) | 3 (43%) | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) |
| Somewhat Agree | 1 (14%) | 2 (29%) | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) |
| Disagree | 1 (14%) |  | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) | 4 (58%) | 4 (58%) |
| Total | **7 (100%)** | **7 (100%)** | **7 (100%)** | **(100%)** |

The growing churches have many more discipleship programs than stagnant churches. Four out of seven people do not know if there any such kind of training in their church. In stagnant churches, there are not sufficient discipleship programs.

Table . Regular leadership development programs in the church

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| There are regular leadership development programs | Church G1 | Church G2 | Church S1 | Church S2 |
| Strongly Agree | 1 (25%) | 1 (25%) | - | - |
| Agree | 3 (75%) | 3 (75%) | 1 (25%) | 2 (50%) |
| Somewhat Agree | - | - | 2 (50%) | - |
| Disagree | - | - | 1 (25%) | 2 (50%) |
| Strongly Disagree | - | - | - | - |
| Total | **4 (100%)** | **4 (100%)** | **4 (100%)** | **4 (100%)** |

The growing churches have a regular leadership development program. The stagnant churches have less regular leadership development programs compare to the growing churches.

Table . Proper training for the current ministry role

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Proper training for the current ministry role | Church G1 | Church G2 | Church S1 | Church S2 |
| Strongly Agree | 1 (25%) | - | - | 2 (50%) |
| Agree | 3 (75%) | 3 (75%) | 1 (25%) | 1 (25%) |
| Somewhat Agree | - | 1 (25%) | 2 (50%) | 1 (25%) |
| Disagree | - | - | 1 (25%) | - |
| Strongly Disagree | - | - | - | - |
| Total | **4 (100%)** | **4 (100%)** | **4 (100%)** | **4 (100%)** |

The leadership team has proper training except for Church S2.

Table . Congregation members by age group

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Church | Up to 15 yrs. | Youth 15 to 25 yrs. | Adult 25-40 yrs. | 40 yrs and above | | Total |
| Church G1 | 143 (26%) | 115 (21%) | 121 (22%) | 171 (31%) | 550 | |
| Church G2 | 110 (34%) | 50 (16%) | 75 (23%) | 80 (25%) | 320 | |
| Church S1 | 10 (24%) | 5 (12%) | 14 (33%) | 12 (29%) | 42 | |
| Church S2 | 10 (12%) | 14 (17%) | 22 (27%) | 36 (44%) | 82 | |

The stagnant churches have a more percentage of adult believers. At the same time, growing churches has more younger people.

Table 9. Congregation members by gender

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Church | Male | Female |
| Church G1 | 40% | 60% |
| Church G2 | 52% | 48% |
| Church S1 | 41% | 59% |
| Church S2 | 40% | 60% |

There is more female congregation in the church than the male congregation except for Church G2.

Table 10. Church congregation size

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Church | Church Age | Congregation Size | | | | | |
| **When Started** | **16 years ago,** | **12 years ago,** | **Eight years ago,** | **Four years ago,** | **Now** |
| Church G1 | 23 years | 15 | 150 | 250 | 350 | 400 | 550 |
| Church G2 | 23 years | 7 | 30 | 75 | 150 | 200 | 320 |
| Church S1 | 27 years | 10 | 100 | 50 | 30 | 40 | 42 |
| Church S2 | 19 years | 5 | 11 | 25 | 55 | 65 | 82 |

The growing churches are growing significantly. The stagnating churches are growing very slowly.

Table . Church congregation size including branch churches

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Church | Church Age | Pastoring For | No. of Branches | Congregation Size | | | |
| **At the beginning** | **Now** | **In branches** | **Total** |
| Church G1 | 23 years | 23 | 12 | 15 | 550 | 570 | 1120 |
| Church G2 | 23 years | 23 | 11 | 7 | 200 | 730 | 320 |
| Church S1 | 27 years | 13 | 1 | 10 | 40 | 20 | 42 |
| Church S2 | 19 years | 19 | 1 | 5 | 65 | 40 | 82 |

All the churches started about 20 years ago or more. All the pastors except for Church S1 are the founding pastor. The growing churches grew in congregational size as well as in the number of branches. The stagnating churches did not grow in congregational size or in the number of branches. All the churches have similar geographical, demographical, socio-political background.

Table . Key factors of church growth

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key factors of church growth | No. of vote | Percentage |
| Gospel preaching | 19 | 19.79% |
| Discipleship | 15 | 15.63% |
| Good testimonies | 17 | 17.71% |
| Healing and deliverance | 12 | 12.50% |
| Prayer and fasting | 14 | 14.58% |
| Social service | 9 | 9.38% |
| Committed believers | 2 | 2.08% |
| Vision, mission, and goals | 3 | 3.13% |
| Leadership | 1 | 1.04% |
| Unity | 4 | 4.17% |
| Total | **96** | **100%** |

The top key factors of church growth are (population size: 23 persons out of 95 votes):

1. Gospel preaching
2. Good testimonies
3. Discipleship
4. Prayer and fasting
5. Healing and deliverance

Table . Key factors of church stagnancy

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key factors of church stagnancy | No. of vote | Percentage |
| Leadership crisis | 4 | 7.84% |
| Bad testimonies | 4 | 7.84% |
| Lack of good faith in believers | 5 | 9.80% |
| Lack of unity | 5 | 9.80% |
| Lack of prayer | 6 | 11.76% |
| Lack of gospel preaching | 7 | 13.73% |
| Lack of sound teaching and training | 4 | 7.84% |
| Lack of discipleship and caring | 6 | 11.76% |
| Lack of vision, mission, and goals | 4 | 7.84% |
| False teaching and persecutions | 6 | 11.76% |
| Total | **51** | **100%** |

The top key factors of church stagnancy are (population size: 11 people out of 51 votes):

1. Lack of gospel preaching
2. Lack of discipleship
3. false teaching and persecution
4. Lack of unity
5. Lack of good faith

Table . Key emphases for church growth

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key emphases for church growth | No. of vote | Percentage |
| Gospel preaching | 28 | 20.29% |
| Discipleship | 24 | 17.39% |
| Prayer and fasting | 24 | 17.39% |
| Social service | 15 | 10.87% |
| Vision, mission, and goals | 18 | 13.04% |
| Leadership training and development program | 12 | 8.70% |
| Maintaining good testimonies | 9 | 6.52% |
| Well-functioning weekly church service | 2 | 1.45% |
| Healing, deliverance, and miracles | 3 | 2.17% |
| Unity | 3 | 2.17% |
| Total | **138** | **100%** |

The top key emphases are (population size: 38 persons out of 138 votes):

1. Gospel preaching
2. Discipleship
3. Prayer and fasting
4. Vision, mission, and goals
5. Community work
6. Leadership training and development

Table . Bottleneck score

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Growing Church | Score | Stagnant Church | Score |
| Church G1 | 38 | Church S1 | 54 |
| Church G2 | 32 | Church S2 | 38 |

The score of pastors of growing and stagnant churches (lower shows that the pastor is more turnaround pastor)

## Findings from the Interviews

### Key Factors of Church Growth need to emphasize

The key contributing factors to church growth among the NIM churches that we need to emphasize to help churches thrive is Gospel preaching, prayer, discipleship/caring, training/leadership development, sound teaching/proper preaching.

6 out of 8 interviews said gospel preaching.

5 out of 8 interviews said the prayer.

5 out of 8 interviews said discipleship and care.

5 out of 8 interviews said training/leadership development.

4 out of 8 interviews said Sound teaching/proper preaching.

### The key factors that keep the church growth momentums

If the church is growing, the gospel sharing, prayer, discipleship/caring, preparing leadership, sound teaching can keep the church growth momentums.

3 out of 4 interviews said gospel sharing.

3 out of 4 interviews said discipleship/caring.

2 out of 4 interviews said preparing leadership.

2 out of 4 interviews said sound teaching.

### The key factors to revive the church

If the church is stagnating, the stagnant church needs to focus upon discipleship, leadership development, and gospel preaching by lifestyle and prayer with fasting.

4 out of 4 interviews said discipleship.

3 out of 4 interviews said leadership development.

3 out of 4 interviews said gospel preaching by lifestyle.

1 out of 4 interviews said the prayer with fasting.

### Main contributor person/s for church growth

The main contributor to church growth is the senior pastor of the church because he/she has a vision, commitment, teamwork, life example.

4 out of 4 interviews said the senior pastor’s vision, teamwork, life example, and commitment contributed to church growth.

4 out of 4 interviews said there are roles of lay leaders and believers to church growth; however, the main contributor is the senior leader. The interviews said this in summary: without the vision, commitment, teamwork, and life example, other lay leaders are not active. Without lay leaders' caring, feeding, and leading lay believers are not active in gospel preaching and will not maintain good testimonies.

### Main responsible person/s for church stagnancy.

The responsible for church stagnancy is the senior pastor because he lacks vision, commitment, leadership skills.

3 out of 4 interviews said the responsible person for church stagnancy is the senior pastor because he lacks vision.

3 out of 4 interviews said the responsible person for church stagnancy is the senior pastor because he lacks commitment because of his financial difficulties.

3 out of 4 interviews said the responsible person for church stagnancy is the senior pastor because he lacks leadership skills.

### Key emphases need to embrace

The emphases do the church need to embrace to keep thriving are prayer, gospel preaching, sound teaching, discipleship, and leadership development. Following are the findings of interview:

6 out of 8 interviews said prayer.

5 out of 8 interviews said gospel preaching.

5 out of 8 interviews said sound teaching.

5 out of 8 interviews said discipleship.

5 out of 8 interviews said leadership development.

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# Vita

The word *vita* is Latin for “life.” This is a brief, prose (not bulleted) biographical section to inform the readers of the author’s background. The above title is 2 inches (5 cm) from the top margin. The Vita should be only a single page. Leave two single-spaced lines between the title and the first line of text. Each paragraph is indented by half an inch (1.25 cm). The text should also be Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced and concise. The Arabic numeral is centered at the bottom of the page.

The Vita should include third-person facts about the author that are pertinent to the dissertation or thesis itself. This includes educational, occupational, and ministry background, as well as church or organization, position held, and family. Write it as if the reader has not read the dissertation, for in all likelihood the reader will skip to the back of the work to find out about the author. Therefore, it is appropriate to share your vision or passion briefly that led you to do the research project that resulted in the study so that the reader will hopefully read it in its entirety. Do not repeat the dissertation content but instead give your data to lend credibility to write on your subject. Do not give thanks here to those who helped you as that should be in the Acknowledgements section. Rather, give a brief (one page only!) personal background that entices readers to want to read the entire dissertation. As such, this is similar to the back cover of a book written to motivate people to read it. Do not make it a C.V., though, as it should be in paragraph form.

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