

WINDESHEIM UNIVERSITY FOR APPLIED SCIENCES

REASONS WHY MEMBERS OF THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD-JESUS  
HOUSE AMSTERDAM ARE LEAVING THE CHURCH

THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF THEOLOGY

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main focus of this research was to explore possible reasons for the continuous decline in the congregational membership of the Redeemed Christian Church of God- Jesus House Amsterdam over the last three years. The central argument is that the church started on a very promising note with regular attendance rising up to three hundred in 2011. However, between late 2011 and 2013, the church had lost 50% of its regular membership that left the church in a critical situation. The research was guided by the following key question and sub-questions: What are the reasons why members of the RCCG-JHA are leaving the Church? What are the missionary activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands? Who are attracted to these missionary activities? What are the expectations of those who were attracted to these missionary activities of RCCG-JHA? Can the church live up to those expectations? Who is leaving the church and where are they going?

To ascertain the reasons for this decline in membership, a semi-structured interview method was adopted. The interviews were carried out with ten former members of the church. It is revealed in this investigation that the phenomenal decline in membership of the church was probably due to inappropriate style of leadership and poor pastors-members' relationships. It is also revealed in this investigation that the leaders of the church accept the fact that several steps were taken to prevent the decline from happening. But those efforts yielded no positive results.

Based on the above, the research proffers necessary steps that may be taken as a way of attempting to arrest the situation. These include installation of a reconciliation committee, restructuring of church offices, and good ministerial / social programs. To make these recommendations more reliable, a personal theological is also given.

Overall, the findings in this research show that a greater number of those that left the

church are willing to return to the church if things improve. On this note, the church may stand the chance of regaining over 50% of her members if things improve and these recommendations are taken seriously. This is also helpful particularly in developing strategies for making church members stay longer and steps for reclaiming some of the former church members.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Defining the Problem of Research

Perhaps, amongst the list of problems confronting the Christian church in contemporary society namely worldliness, persecution, poor leadership, immorality, and scandal of particularity; I think, none is as challenging and discouraging as the problem of rapid decline of church membership. In fact, the rapid and sudden decline of membership strength in many local churches in recent times calls for worry. Perhaps, this ugly phenomenon could have been responsible for R. Nial Bradshaw's ([www.charismanews.com](http://www.charismanews.com), retrieved on 15/08/2014) most pertinent question, "why are the more liberal mainline Protestant denominations seemingly bleeding members?" It is obvious from this quote, that Bradshaw in this case was not particularly addressing the decline of membership in Pentecostal churches. However, his question is relevant since it generally talks about the decline of church membership. By "bleeding members", Bradshaw is no doubt referring to the rapid and sudden decline of membership in most contemporary mainline liberal churches. As it were, Bradshaw was shocked at the rate at which mainline liberal churches were losing their members on a daily basis. Thus, it became necessary for him to inquire into the possible causative factors that could have brought about this ugly situation.

A similar observation in this regard, is also made by Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge and Donald A. Luidens ([www.leaders.com](http://www.leaders.com) retrieved on 15/08/2014), who in evaluating the current situation of America's mainline Protestant churches lament that "America's so-called mainline Protestant churches are not what they used to be. They argue that for generations, the Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and kindred denominations reported net annual



membership gains. In short, they had very impressive growth during the 1950s. A steady slow down of their growth however, began in the early 1960s, and after the middle of the decade they had significantly lose members. Consequently, by 1990 these denominations had lost between one-fifth and one-third of the membership they claimed in 1965. This decline of membership according to them has continued until date.

Quite clearly, the situation is not peculiar to American churches alone, as these authors have stated above. May be, much more so than the American churches, European churches appeared to have their own share as well. The rapid and sudden decline of church membership is an inescapable reality of mainline Protestant churches all over the world as these authors have argued. Although, such decline in membership may not be peculiar to mainline Protestant churches alone. What makes the issue perhaps most worrisome is the fact that even some Pentecostal churches that are known to be heavily populated with members are also reasonably experiencing rapid decline in church membership. A case in point is the situation of the ‘Redeemed Christian Church of God- Jesus House Parish, Amsterdam’.<sup>1</sup>

The RCCG-JHA at its inception in Amsterdam in May 1999 actually started on a very promising note. In fact, information gathered from Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi, the head Pastor of the church, during the course of this research affirms that there was a unanimous projection that the church will be a very dynamic and vital assembly in Amsterdam following a phenomenal increase in the attendance sheet. As at early 2011, regular membership had already reached 300 (Interview with Pastor I. Abarshi, on 10/10/2013). However, this hope was short-lived as the church began to experience membership decline in December 2012. Since then the church has

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<sup>1</sup>The Redeemed Christian Church of God is hereafter called RCCG while Jesus House Amsterdam is hereafter referred to as JHA

continued to experience a steady decline in membership. The most worrisome decline of church membership in RCCG-JHA came in 2013 when regular attendance sheet counts no more than 150 members. By the end of 2013, the church had lost 50% of her membership. (Figures and information extracted from Church records Book). This decline of church membership has adversely affected the activities of the church. Also, it has become a matter of serious concern to the leadership.

The leadership of the RCCG-JHA church has made conscientious efforts to tackle the situation and avoid further decline of membership, but the situation appears not to have improved. For example, as a means of successfully tackling the situation, the church has set up different categories of events, groups, and departments in order to ensure that all members have a sense of belonging in the ongoing activities, groups and departments in the church. Speaking particularly, on the efforts made by the leadership, Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi notes that they have used both common and uncommon strategies in responding to the situation. The former include church planting, house fellowships, mid-week special services, Sunday school, writing of evangelism tracts, visitations, and special outreach events. The latter consist of sports/sport club, youth camps, radio and television advertisements, talk shows, and special events namely music festivals, drama nights, and praise nights (Interview with Pastor I. Abarshi, on 10/10/2013).

All these activities were targeted towards retaining the membership of the church as well as restraining them from exiting or leaving. However, it appears, these efforts are yet to yield the expected results, as there is still evidence of decline of membership in the Church. Thus, it has become imperative to investigate the possible root causes of this rapid decline of membership in the 'Redeemed Christian Church of God-Jesus House Amsterdam.

To achieve this, the researcher will adopt a three-fold approach namely theological, historical and empirical. In the theological approach, the researcher will seek to advocate for a better understanding of the concept of the ‘church’. This is because, the researcher believes that the problem of decline of membership of a local church, particularly, the RCCG-JHA, may be primarily theological. Thus, as a student of theology, I would bring my theological knowledge to bear in attempting to tackle this problem. The historical approach is also necessary because, the RCCG-JHA is located within a historical context. As C.W. Deweese (1984:2) rightly asserts that “a written history can inspire members to deal courageously with difficult challenges by pointing with gratitude, to the contribution of their spiritual ancestors”. Thus, in the historical approach, I will attempt to give a brief historical background of the situation. Finally, since the research is mainly a phenomenological one, the researcher will also adopt an empirical approach. In this empirical approach, a semi-structured interview method will be used. This approach is key because it will enable the researcher to gather primary data. It is important to add that these three approaches: theological, historical and empirical approaches will define the methodology of this research.

## **1.2 Question and Sub-questions of Research**

The main question of this research work is: What are the reasons why members of the RCCG-JHA are leaving the Church? To ascertain the cause of decline of membership in this church, the following sub questions will also be carefully considered:

1. What are the missionary activities of RCCG-JHA in The Netherlands?
2. Who are attracted to these missionary activities?
3. What are the expectations of those who were attracted to these missionary activities of RCCG-JHA?

4. Can the church live up to those expectations?
5. Who is leaving the church and where are they going?

### **1.3 Purpose of Study**

As already stated, the phenomenal decline of church membership in RCCG-JHA requires urgent attention. Thus, the purpose of this research is multifaceted. First, the study will attempt to explore the main reasons for the decline of church membership in RCCG-JHA. To achieve this, the study will begin by giving a brief history of migration and the establishment of the church in The Netherlands. The researcher believes that this decline did not occur in a vacuum and that there are factors responsible for it. In part, these factors may range from economical, psychological, and theological factors. For these reasons, there will be need for proper understanding of these causal factors before attempting to provide any useful solution. It is in part the primary purpose of this research to bring these causal factors into lime light as well as critically discussed them.

Second, the study seeks to provide a balcony view of the faith journey of the church from which the church can easily identify strengths and weaknesses and hopefully act on them in a guided search for solutions. Finally, the research is intended to find the appropriate knowledge needed in order to make those who are attracted to the church to stay longer. The research will also give recommendations to the church board in order to develop better workable and practical policies that will eventually keep people from leaving the RCCG-JHA for other churches. It is important to say that the nature of this research requires a particular methodological approach. Thus, I have devoted the whole of chapter three for the research method adopted in this work.

#### **1.4. Scope / Structure of Study**

For purpose of clarity and better understanding, the scope of this research is limited to RCCG-JHA only. Although, there is a strong connection between other African Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands and the RCCG-JHA, my investigation does not cover the whole spectrum of these churches.

Structurally, this research work consists of five chapters. After having introduced the research problem and question in this current chapter, I present the history of migration and establishment of RCCG-JHA in chapter two. Chapter three is mainly the methodology adopted in carrying out this research. In it, I discussed in details the steps taken in gathering my facts. In chapter four, I undertake a critical analysis of these data. The research ends in Chapter five, where I give my overall conclusion as well as give some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF MIGRATION AND RCCG-JHA IN THE NETHERLANDS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, my concern is to give a detailed historical survey of migration into the Netherlands and the subsequent establishment of RCCG-JHA. For this reason, the chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, I give a brief history of migration into The Netherlands. The second section examines the history of migration of Nigerians and Nigerian churches in the Netherlands. In the third section, I examine the history of the RCCG-JHA in particular. While the last section presents the missionary activities of the church. The main question guiding this chapter is: what was the main purpose of establishing the RCCG-JHA?

### **2.2 History of Migration into the Netherlands**

It is important to start this section with a brief survey of the history of migration into the Netherlands. There is a long history to the issue of migration. This could be due to economic reasons. For example, Lucassen and Penninx (1997) already note that from 1590 to 1800 the estimated foreign-born population in the Netherlands was never less than 5%. These immigrants included many Huguenots – Protestants from France - and Jews from Southern and Eastern Europe. In the 19th century, the foreign-born population declined, reaching about 2% in 1880. Ersanilli (2007) remarks that from 1870 until just after the Second World War, there were more people leaving than entering the country, despite some ongoing immigration. Thus, immigrants from the former colonies and from guest worker recruitment countries dominated post war period.

A remarkable shift from this steady decline occurs when Suriname gained independence. In fact, the independence of Suriname in 1975 led to an increase in the number of immigrants from that country. However, like many other Western European countries, the Netherlands started to recruit guest workers in the 1960s, first from Southern Europe, and later from Yugoslavia, Turkey and Morocco. Another flow of migration was from the Caribbean Islands of the Netherlands' Antilles and Aruba following the unpredictable economic situation of 1990s.

While majority of those from Southern Europe returned, according to Ersanilli (2007), workers from Turkey and Morocco, however, did not return. After the recruitment stopped in 1974, guest workers from Turkey and Morocco prolonged their stay in the Netherlands and were later joined by their families. These four groups, Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks and Moroccans, therefore form the major immigrant groups and the more researched groups in the Netherlands. Since then a new set of migrants (economic, refugees and asylum seekers) arrived in the Netherlands, these are the “newcomers” and among them are Ghanaians, Somalis, Iraqis, Iranians, Afghanistans, Nigerians, etc. Based on the above history, it may be safe to say that the establishment of African Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands is traceable to this migration.

### **2.3 Nigerians and Nigerian Churches in the Netherlands**

Record from the (2011) National Bureau of Statistics GDP Forecast for Nigerians in the Netherlands (<http://www.nigeriansat.gov.ng/uploads/latestrelease> Retrieved 20/07/2014) shows that there are 10,676 Nigerians living in the Netherlands. This population is made up of Nigerians from different ethnic groups, mostly from the Southern part of Nigeria and essentially of the Christian faith. Haime (2006) makes this point clear when he observes while profiling Nigerians that it is mostly Nigerian Christians who travelled to the Netherlands and not the

Muslims. There are therefore many Nigerian migrant Churches in the Netherlands because Churches are the gathering points for Nigerian immigrants irrespective of their status.

This is not strange because, there is usually a strong sense of communal living in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. They seek to re-establish this communal sense of living in the Netherlands and this accounts for why these churches were established.

## **2.4 History of Jesus House Amsterdam**

The RCCG-JHA is one of the local churches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which was established in Lagos, Nigeria in 1952 (<http://www.rccg.ng> retrieved 15/10/2013). The General Overseer of the church is Pastor E. A. Adeboye, in Nigeria and worldwide. The history of RCCG-JHA began when in April 1999; the Lord laid a burden on the heart of Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi (the founding pastor of JHA) for the city of Amsterdam. A prayer group was raised to pray for that city. In May 1999, Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi visited Amsterdam for the first time under the project "Mission to Amsterdam". During that period, Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi travelled to RCCG Holland Mission in Den Haag and discussed his purpose of visiting The Netherlands (extract from RCCG-JHA's Pamphlet on the history of the church).

The main reason for his visit was to fulfill what God has laid on his heart, which is the establishment of RCCG presence in Amsterdam. After this brief visit, Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi went back to Nigeria and a "Macedonian Fund" was launched by the Area Eleven headquarters of the RCCG (Lagos) towards the realization of this goal. The "Area Eleven" is one of the regional RCCG Headquarters in Nigeria that is controlling local parishes in their vicinity. This church sent Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi to the Netherlands. In October 1999, Ibrahim Abarshi and his wife, Ebun Abarshi, returned to the Netherlands to commence the initial work. As a result of the October visit, a number of useful contacts were established with individuals and organizations in Amsterdam (extract from RCCG-JHA's Pamphlet on the history of the church).



A similar series of trips by the Pastor and his wife followed thereafter. The breakthrough finally came in April 2000 with the formation of an initial team of five members namely Pastor Ibrahim Abarshi, Pastor Ebun Abarshi, Pastor Isaac Aleshinloye, Brother Femi Adekoya and Sister Toyin Adekoya.

Consequently, a venue was secured at the Holiday Inn (Amsterdam RAI) towards the end of April, 2001. But before then, the first preparatory meeting took place at Wassenaar in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Eddie Wikina on the 11th of April 2001. The following people joined the initial group to form the core pioneer team of Jesus House Amsterdam: Bro. Eddie Wikina, sister Ada Wikina, Bro. Osten Olorunshola, Bro. Felis Larry, Sis. Rashy Larry and Bro. Jalele Erega. Soon after, Bro Nelson Adelesi, brother Monday Aikamhenze, Sis. Tracy Osaigbovo and Sis. Jennifer Oloja also joined. Prior to the official inauguration of Jesus House on the 2nd of June 2001, series of prayer initiatives were undertaken, including a prayer walk (walking and praying), prayer drive (driving and praying), night vigils amongst others, that focused on the city of Amsterdam and the newly formed church (extract from RCCG-JHA's Pamphlet on the history of the church).

By the end of October, 2001 up to early 2011, the Sunday service attendance sheet of Jesus House Amsterdam shows that attendance had increased to one hundred and fifty with congregation membership representatives of over eleven nations varying from The Netherlands, Germany, Suriname, France, Ghana, Nigeria, South African, Togo, Senegal, Britain and America (extract from RCCG-JHA's Attendance Sheet). This was what compelled the church to look for a bigger and permanent place of worship. Soon, a building was secured.

The building is situated in an industrialized area of Amsterdam. It is located in the Ikea-Arena-Bijlmermeer triangle in Amsterdam South-East (Zuid-Oost). The building is very close to the Heineken Music Hall, the Ajax Stadium and Ikea, the inner city of Amsterdam. In addition, it

is surrounded by first class shopping centers with easy access and a fairly large parking area. The facility can be accessed via two major motorways, the A9 and A2/E35. It is also well serviced by public transport systems - bus and metro areas. The facility includes three large halls certified and equipped to sit from 200 to 600 people. This unique building also has several small beautiful meeting rooms designed to hold different cell groups or departmental meetings as well as other smaller groups in the church. The main hall is equipped with ultra-modern audio-visual equipment needed for church activities and special programs. The well-lit hall gives the worshipers good atmosphere for worship (<http://www.rccghouseamsterdam.org/index.html> Retrieved 15/10/2013).

All the above factors favored the steady growth of the church and encouraged increase in membership. In fact, records show that between 2001 and early 2011, the membership of the church has already reached 300 worshippers. This was actually good news to the church. However, the story changed in late 2011 when the church started to experience a decline in membership. By 2013 the membership strength has already decline to 150. It was this strange experience of phenomenal decline of a church that once blossoms that have made this research imperative so that the possible causes of this decline could be ascertained.

## **2.5. The Overall Purpose of the Church**

The overall purpose for establishing RCCG-JHA was to establish and expand the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in The Netherlands. This is the overriding mission of RCCG-JHA as God's people (RCCG Minister's Conference Manual, 2009:2). It is firmly established that when the church bears much fruit - spiritually and numerically, then God in heaven is glorified (cf. John 15:8) just as would any farmer. The RCCG-JHA believes without any reservation that the key to church growth is partnership (RCCG Minister's Conference Manual, 2009:4) First, between the Lord and His church, then among church leaders (ministers and workers). Also,

between church leaders and their respective congregations and between the church and the community (RCCG Minister's Conference Manual, 2009:10).

To this end, the church had devoted substantial time in mobilizing all her resources for the work of the gospel. The significant growth experienced between 2011 and 2012 could be attributed to the overall purpose of establishing it. The leaders of the Church believe they have met the Lord's expectations of bringing about much growth in His church since inception (2013 Annual Report to the General Overseer, Pastor E. A. Adegboye). Why then is it that a church which is believed to have impacted so much in the lives of its members as well as its immediate environment suddenly turned to a place where people no longer want to stay and worship? What are those things that work and do not work in the activities of the church?

## **2.6. Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA**

The overriding purpose of the church informed its missionary activities. And these missionary activities contributed to the growth of the church during the periods of 2011-2012. During the few months at this new place of worship, the church experienced a tremendous growth and by the middle of 2012, the Sunday service attendance sheet had increased to three hundred (300) regular worshippers. In part, the leadership of the church attributed this growth to some missionary activities of the church in Amsterdam which include: showing of love to all members, caring, helping the needy, sharing their pain and joy together, maximizing their potentials by given them the necessary support and encouragement, building lives and above all, preparing a people from all nations for the Lord, spreading God's unconditional love which is available to the world through Jesus Christ.

The pastor was available to all members for counseling and the people felt loved and welcomed, church activities were in proper shape. Those who desired to be loved got what they wanted, those who were lonely got an association of friends and family in Christ, the poor were

being catered for and needs were met. These were the missionaries' activities of JHA and many people were attracted to the church as a result of all these activities (Interview with Pastor Ebun Abarshi on 10/10/2013). What then is the root cause of the decline of church membership in RCCG-JHA beginning from late 2012-2013? The remaining chapters of this research will be used in analyzing the comments of respondents. Meanwhile, there is need to discuss the mode of data collection in this immediate chapter. Thereafter, I shall proceed to analyze my findings in chapter four.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the research design and procedure used in carrying out this study. The chapter is arranged under the following sub-headings: introduction, research design, sources of data, methods of data collection and the method of data analysis.

### **3.2. Research Design**

A study about the church may be very demanding. Against this backdrop, the peculiar nature of this study, presupposes the use of three methods to achieve the desired objectives and these are the historical, theological and empirical. The historical method is adopted to critically investigate the origin of events, developments, and experiences about the decline of membership of RCCG-JHA. As Iain D. Campbell (2004:10) rightly puts, “the events of this world’s history set the stage upon which the drama of redemption is enacted”. Again, commenting on the value of history, R. W. Glenn (2007: 17) posits “in order to understand where we’re going, we need to understand where we came from. Knowing your trajectory allows you to understand yourself better, to put your experience in the proper perspective”.

The historical method also helps the researcher to trace the history of the advent of Nigerian migrants and the beginning of establishments of African Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands. It helps us to understand the nature of operations of RCCG-JHA within the specific era of 2001-2013. A chronicle of this history revealed the response and practical steps taken by the RCCG-JHA towards ministerial challenges especially the challenge of decline of church membership. D. A. Carson (1986, 1995:18) arguing from a different context also notes that “history, though it cannot in itself justify a belief system, not only sharpens the categories and informs the debate but serves as a major checkpoint to help us prevent uncontrolled speculation,

purely private theological articulation, and overly imaginative exegesis”. It is important to state that even though Carson was arguing from the angle of biblical theology, his thought is nevertheless relevant in this context especially his remark that “history can be a major checkpoint to help us prevent uncontrolled speculation”. The historical approach will certainly help prevent speculations about the establishment of the church.

The theological approach is also used in this work to determine and analyze the phenomenal decline of membership of RCCG-JHA from a theological point of view. The word ‘theology’ in this sense according to Bruce Milne (1998:17), literally means “the science of God”, or more fully, “thought and speech which issue from a knowledge of God”. Wayne Grudem (1994:21) sees it as “any study that answers the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today about any given topic?”. The importance of this approach is seen from the words of Mark A. Noll (1997:16) who approvingly opines as follows:

If a contemporary believer wants to know the will of God as revealed in Scripture on any of these matters or on thousands more, it is certainly prudent to study the Bible carefully for oneself. But it is just as prudent to look for help, to realize that the question I am bringing to Scripture has doubtless been asked before and will have been addressed by others who were at least as saintly as I am, at least as patient in pondering the written Word, and at least as knowledgeable about the human heart.

Jaroslav Pelikan (1971:9) also speaks about the importance of the theological perspective, when he wrote as follows:

the theological perspectives which may involve a close reading of Scripture, tend to yield new results- “new” not in the sense of finding something that was never there to begin with, but “new” in the sense of discovering something for the first time that was always there, but never noticed. The rub forced us to look at it. And the rub paved new pathway for further doctrinal study (and development), which heretofore had never been blazed.

Finally, since this research is carried out mainly within a particular given church, the researcher also adopted an empirical approach. In this empirical approach, a semi-structured interview method was considered. This approach was preferred because it enabled the researcher to gather primary data. It is important to add that these three approaches: theological, historical and empirical approaches defined the methodology of this research.

### **3.3 Area of the Study**

The study was carried out in RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands. The choice of RCCG-JHA for this study stems from the fact that I have in time past did my internship in the church thereby gained an insight to few challenges confronting the church. This research, therefore, hopefully serves as a case study of a typical African Pentecostal church in Amsterdam in particular and the Netherlands in general.

### **3.4 Population of the Study**

The population of this study consists of all the members of RCCG-JHA. In this research, I decided to interview ten church members (they are hereafter referred to as respondents) who no longer attend the church due to one reason or the other. These former church members were randomly selected from all departments of the church under study and were interviewed accordingly. This random selection was due to availability of the interviewees.

### **3.5 Sources of data**

In this study, data was collected from two main sources namely primary and secondary. The primary sources included oral interviews, church minutes, archival materials, my personal experience during internship and other valuable sources. Secondary sources included Dictionaries, Encyclopedia, Commentaries, Published Works, Journal Articles, Magazines, Newspaper, Bulletins, Working Papers, Internet Materials, and Books.

### **3.6 Method of Data Collection**

In order to get appropriate insights as to the decline of church membership in RCCG-JHA, for proper analysis in this work, the researcher used oral interview method as against focal group interview. The oral interview took the form of semi-structured and unstructured questions, the former for restricted response while the later was for free response interview. The responses were both recorded and transcribed as occasion demanded. My motivation for this method of collecting data in this research was the work by Helen Cameron (2005:9) who defined an interview as “a data gathering conversation guided by the research”.

The purpose of this oral interactive study was to uncover hidden facts that may otherwise be difficult to get regarding the decline of church membership in RCCG-JHA. Again, Philippe (2008) argued that, “Whilst in social sciences and other disciplines recordings will be kept secure in a locked environment and be destroyed once data capture and analysis is complete”. In this case, I would do otherwise. The researcher will duly analyze and preserve the recording of these oral interviews. The data gathered from these interviews can be a valuable source of information for church growth.

### **3.7. Method of Data Analysis**

This study is a survey of decline of membership in RCCG-JHA and as such, the researcher employed the qualitative approach in analyzing data. By this method of analysis, the researcher was able to identify reasons and nature of the effect of this decline of membership on the entire church. It also provides a platform on practical steps to be taken. The findings of this research will be discussed in the next chapter.



### **3.8. Limitations of Research**

During the course of carrying out this research, I was particularly confronted with the problem of availability of the interviewees, financial constraint and inadequate time for the research. Since the research was primarily empirical, it required personal observation, personal contact and internship to enable me gather the necessary data. For this reason, a lot of travels were made which was time consuming and required some financial involvements. The main strength of this research is that it provides me with first hand information about the operations of the RCCG-JHA. It also widens my horizons on the possible reasons that could make members to leave their churches. The major weakness in all this is that the findings of this research may not be applicable to other churches.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTIFIED REASONS FOR DECLINE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

### **4.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine some reasons why members leave their churches in general and RCCG-JHA in particular. To achieve this, the chapter begins with a review of literatures on theories and reasons for decline of church membership in contemporary time. In section two of this chapter, some reasons for the decline of membership in RCCG-JHA are identified and appropriately analyzed based on the data collected from the ten respondents. Section three, consists of the major step taken by the church to curbing the situation while the last section consists of a brief evaluation and conclusion of the findings of the responses of these members.

### **4.2. General Reasons**

Generally, there are several theories that have been advanced to explain the decline of church membership in contemporary times. These theories range from sociological, economical, psychological, political, religious, and theological.

Perhaps, the most popular sociological theory is the “secularization theory” that attributes the phenomenal decline of church membership to the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and the wide spread of mass education. By definition, secularization means the transformation of a society from close identification with religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and secular institutions (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/secularization>. Retrieved 15/08/2014). Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2004) define the secularization thesis to mean “the belief that as societies progress, particularly through modernization and rationalization, religion loses its authority in all aspects of social life and governance”. The most outstanding promoters of this theory include social theorists such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber

and Emile Durkheim. They postulated “the modernization of society would include a decline in levels of religiosity” (<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?Retrieved> 15/08/2014).

The theory of secularization has attracted intense debate from scholars. For example, Benton Johnson et. al. (1993:26) have observed that if secularization was the sole explanation of the phenomenal decline of church membership, all but the most culturally insulated sectors of American religion would be losing members. However, experience has shown otherwise. Some churches for now are at least sustaining their membership while others are fast growing. Biblically conservative nondenominational Christian Fellowships, for example are among the fastest growing, and their typical location is not in rural areas but in major metropolitan centers. For him then, to explain the decline of church membership, one must look instead for special factors at work within these churches themselves or in the lives of their constituents. Thus, for him, the secularization theory is faulty.

A similar objection to the secularization theory has been made by Rodney Stark et al. (2002) and Peter Berger (1976, 1999) who have argued that rather than religion declining, it is rather becoming strengthened and organized with more sects and cults springing up in contemporary society (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/secularization>. Retrieved 15/08/2014).

But Hans Blumenberg (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/secularization>. Retrieved 15/08/2014) has rejected any idea of a historical continuity of religion thereby endorsing the secularization theorem. For him, the modern age represents an independent epoch opposed to religion in ancient and Middle Ages of human curiosity in reaction to theological absolutism. Mark Chaves (1994) on his part has countered those who refused to accept the theory of secularization by introducing the idea of neo-secularization, which broadens the meaning of secularization to include the decline of religious authority and its ability to influence our present society.

It is important to state that while the argument continues, the definitions above have been concern about the decline of religious institutions and not members of churches per say. On this note, I do not subscribe to the idea that the theory of secularization with respect to decline of religious institutions can account for the phenomenal decline of religion. In fact, the case in Nigeria shows that instead of religion declining in its role in modern society, it is rather gaining more strength and this is the reason why we have more religious conflicts in Nigeria now than ever before.

A second theory that seeks to account for the decline of church membership is the one propounded by Dean M. Kelly (1972). Kelly in his theory argues that the phenomenal decline of church membership happens because churches have become weak as religious bodies. He distinguishes between strong religious bodies and weak ones, noting that the former provide clear cut, compelling answers to questions concerning the meaning of life, mobilize their members' energies for shared purposes, require a distinctive code of conduct, and discipline their members for failure to live up to expectations. The latter allows for a diversity of theological viewpoints, do not and cannot command much of their members' time or effort, promote few if any distinctive rules of conduct and discipline no one for violating them. Overall, strong religion fosters a level of commitment that binds members to the group; weak religions have low levels of commitment and are unable to resist influences that lower it even further.

Whether Kelly is right or not is another issue entirely. The relevance of his work is that he believes there is a decline in church membership in some churches and he attributes this decline of church membership to weak religious bodies. William D. Hendricks (1993:17) on his part sees disillusionment as the major reason why there is a phenomenal decline in church membership. He notes remarkably that despite glowing reports of surging church attendance, more and more Christians in North America are feeling disillusioned with the church and other formal, institutional expressions of Christianity. These people according to him removed

themselves from the church out of frustration with structure or bureaucracy. Not everyone may subscribe to Hendricks' proposition in this way. But the fact remains that when people expect much from a church and receive less, it could cause frustration and make them to leave. Thus, in part, frustration can cause mass exodus of people from the church.

John D. Duncan (2004) on his part outlined five more reasons for the decline of church membership to include, poor leadership, different style, specific programs, inner hurts, and church size. Wayne Jackson (<http://www.charismanews.com>, Retrieved 15/08/2014) has also lent his voice. He attributes the phenomenal decline of church membership to the following:

1. Many of them "quit church" because they simply got too busy.
2. Others leave church because of family and home responsibilities prevented their continued connection with church.
3. A considerable number complained that they had become disenchanted with church leaders or members.
4. Many leave because they feel church members are judgmental and hypocritical, etc.
5. Others claim they leave the church because they lost faith in organized religion.
6. Some leave because of changing circumstances in their lives. A divorce for example, can cause a person to leave.
7. Many others leave their churches because of transfer from their jobs into an isolated area where there are no Christians.

Finally, Benjamin L. Corey (2013) identifies ten reasons why people from all generations leave church. These reasons according to him include the following:

1. People leave church when they can't find community.

2. People leave church because they need less drama in their lives. By drama, he means attitude of members that can cause and add to one's emotional trauma rather than alleviate it.
3. People leave church because of unresolved conflict. He notes that a healthy and life giving community is one that practices healthy conflict resolution in order to keep relationship safe and whole. When this is lacking, membership decline begins to take place.
4. People leave church because of controlling leaders and unskilled teachers.
5. People leave church because social climbing, cliques and nepotism turn them off. By social climbing, he means a phenomenon where position of service in the church is not based on area of gifting and merit but based on financial status.
6. People leave church when they feel like they need to become a carbon copy of an individual or ideal in order to be fully included and appreciated.
7. People leave church because they are tired of being told how a good Christian will vote.
8. People leave church because they are looking for something authentic.
9. People leave church because they feel lonely, and
10. Finally, people leave church when they don't find Jesus.

All these are general reasons why people leave their churches. These views are also closely related to the view expressed by Pritchard (2011:14) who in his investigation to the causes of the phenomenal decline of church membership explores the following factors as being responsible for driving people out of church. Top of the list is the damaging experiences in church. According to him,

People get damaged by the church, sometimes they are overworked, and sometimes they are undervalued, sometimes bullied. Sometimes their good will is abused, sometimes they are manipulated and made to feel guilty, and sometimes they are taught in damaging ways.

Sometimes they are let down by the leadership. It is all very wounding and it is not surprising that the victims do not want to return to the scene of the crime.

Quite clearly, these reasons are genuine and could be reckoned with as factors capable of causing a phenomenal decline of membership in any particular church. However, the pertinent questions to ask are: can these reasons also account for the phenomenal decline of membership of RCCG-JHA? Are they also directly applicable to the situation in RCCG-JHA? If they are, to what extent are they applicable? The next section will seek to answer these questions.

#### **4.3. Identified Reasons in RCCG-JHA**

In order to have a more theological and practical understanding to why the congregational members of RCCG-JHA are leaving the church; a total number of ten interviews were conducted on individuals who were former members but who no longer attend the church.

It is important to state that due to the vast amount of information obtained in each interview, I have decided not to include all their answers but have carefully selected and used only the aspects that were most relevant to my work. All of the ten interviews in this chapter are found in Appendix C. I have further labeled the ten respondents in this chapter as follows: Interview One, R1, Interview Two, R2, Interview Three, R3, Interview Four, R4, Interview Five, R5, Interview Six, R6, Interview Seven, R7, Interview Eight, R8, Interview Nine, R9 and Interview Ten, R10

The table below shows their sex, age, educational level, position in church, duration of attendance, time left and number of years in the Netherlands.

	SEX	AGE	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	POSITION IN CHURCH	DURATION OF ATTENDANCE	TIME LEFT
R1	M	28	B.SC	WORKER	5 YEARS	2013
R2	F	30	UNDER GRADUATE	WORKER	2 YEARS	2013
R3	M	54	N/A	WORKER	4YEARS	2013
R4	M	31	B.SC	MEMBER	5 YEARS	2012
R5	M	33	N/A	MEMBER	3 YEARS	2013
R6	F	27	N/A	WORKER	4 YEARS	2013
R7	M	35	N/A	WORKER	6 YEARS	2013
R8	F	32	DEGREE	WORKER	8 YEARS	2012
R9	F	24	N/A	MEMBER	6 YEARS	2013
R10	M	26	UNDER GRADUATE	MEMBER	4 YEARS	2013

Jamieson (2001:36) has argued that people who leave church do not do so suddenly. They leave in a gradual process of reflection, questioning, and withdrawal, which may last for months or even years. In other words, people who leave church make an intentional and informed decision to leave. The following comments were extracted from two of the selected respondents as to why the decline of membership in RCCG-JHA.

Below is the response of R1:

I am confused over the emotions I feel. Sometimes, I look back and I am glad to have left Jesus House- Amsterdam. I enjoy the new freedoms I have in Christ and relief from the burdens I was carrying for many years while in the church. At other times, I suffered the pain over the lost years and lost friendships. The day I finally decided to leave, I was so beaten down and confused that I did not know how to distinguish truth from false. The reason was that the leadership of the church



does not welcome dialogue, advice, evaluation, and questions from church members. I noticed the leadership of the church felt threatened by any opinions whether from church members or church workers. People are discouraged from asking hard questions. The rule is, don't ask tough questions because it might not go well with the leaders. Many a times, disagreement with the pastor is considered disloyalty and is virtually equal to disobeying God. Spiritual language is used to disguise the manipulation that is going on in the church. Questioners are labeled rebellious, insubordinate, and disruptive to the harmony of the body.

However, the case of R3 is different from the case of R1. R3 states:

My wife and I did not leave the church because we were dissatisfied rather, we left because we knew we were gifted with talents and ministries but felt restrained from exercising them. My wife and I were excluded from singing on the Worship Team because; apparently we did not fit the “hip hop” music image the church wants to project. I don’t think this describes an entitlement mentality. We’re just frustrated at not being allowed to use our spiritual gifts in our local church, and to put it bluntly, we’re really lonely. We saw ourselves as victims of a church culture that is promoting an atmosphere to attract the younger ones of the society at the expense of neglecting the older age groups in the church.

It is slightly obvious that both R1 and R3 have different opinions regarding their departure.

While R1 pays more attention on the negative side of the leadership of the church, R3 on the other hand believes the church does not give room for members to exercise their God-given talent.

## Finding on Missionary of the Church

R1	
R2	The church started with the aim of transforming the immediate community with the Word of God
R3	Proclamation of the gospel to all nations
R4	Raising leaders that will influence the nations positively with the Word of God
R5	Maximizing potentials and building skills
R6	Spreading the Word of God
R7	Preaching the Good News and building relationships
R8	Extending and expanding the Word of God
R9	Raising leaders and building lives for the work of God
R10	Preparing a people who will take the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to all nations

From the above, all the respondents believed the RCCG-JHA started with a clear vision.

The missionary activity of the church was well defined by the respondents and they all accepted that the church was tailored towards spreading the gospel as well transforming lives.

## Finding on Expectations of Members

R1	I expected to have found a community of faith where I felt needs can be met both spiritually and physically
R2	I was not expecting anything other than a place where the undiluted Word of God is being preached
R3	Well, my expectation is to be in the gathering of saints. That's all.
R4	What I expect was a place where problems can be shared and solved
R5	I expected to have found a place where I can share my problem and get a good advice.
R6	My expectation was to have been in a church where there is no cultural difference.
R7	I expect a community of faith where we can study the Word together and then act on it.
R8	Honestly I was expecting to have been in a place where I can confidently face all challenges with the help of fellow brethren who profess Christ as their Lord and Savior
R9	My expectation is not more than praying together with fellow Christians as well shared the Word of God
R10	I expected to have been in a place where God answers prayers.

From these responses, it is clear that the expectations of these members from the church were building of lives, transforming the immediate community, raising of leaders, and preaching the word of God. However, it appears the church may have fallen short of these expectations. This immediately suggests that possibly the vision of the church was not properly clear to members of RCCG-JHA and this accounts for their leaving. So in addition to the problem of build relationship, poor leadership, and non-recognition of members' spiritual gifts; there is also the dimension of unclear leadership vision. Some of the responses on the table below also attest to the fact that there was probably a disconnect between the expectations of this members on the one hand, and the vision of the church on the other.

### ***Finding on the Purpose of the Church***

R1	Well, to me, it seems the church started very well. But fell short of the expectations along the line.
R2	Yes, the church started on a promising note. Until a stage when things began to go wrong
R3	I saw what I was expecting when I join the church, and I left when those things were no longer there
R4	I think the church was doing well until certain stage when things no longer work again
R5	I believe the church lived up to that expectation in time past, but not anymore
R6	Yes, the church had lived up to that expectations but could not maintain it.
R7	Of course, the church started very well. Until a certain stage when pride and ego boast set in among the leaders
R8	It uses to be a lovely atmosphere. But not anymore
R9	Yes, the church lived up to the expectations
R10	Yes, I saw those expectations there when I joined the church

Further investigation on members about whether the church has fulfilled her purpose of establishment or not shows that the church falls short of meeting the needs of her members. The responses gathered from respondents suggest that the failure of the church to meet the needs of her members began somewhere. However, it was quite clear when the dissatisfaction of these members over the leadership in particular and the church actually started. It was nonetheless clear that the declining of the attendance started when some members felt those expectations were not met.

## Finding on Reasons for the Decline

R1	I left because the leadership of the church was not doing what they supposed to do
R2	I left because I was tired about the old ways of doing things in the church
R3	No room for me to utilize my God-given talent
R4	Leadership eye service had become increasingly rampant in the church.
R5	I left due to personal reasons; I don't want to talk about it please.
R6	The church had become a place where gossip, backbiting and all sort of illicit behavior now reign supreme
R7	The church is no longer what it used to be
R8	Tribal differences had reflected in the attitude of both the leaders and the congregations
R9	The leaders no longer pay attention to the spiritual well being of the members
R10	The leaders hate suggestions and corrections.

From the above, the respondents gave clear reasons as to why they left the church. Similar among the respondents were R1, R9, and R10. Their responses centered on the leadership of the church. These were the people who believed they have been hurt by the church's pastor and they constitute 40% of the respondents. R8 believes that there is tribal sentiment in the church.

R2 believes the church does not introduce new ways of doing things in the church activities. Hence, for R2 there is a lack of dynamism in the RCCG-JHA and that in part accounts for the phenomenal decline in membership. R3 on the other hand, stresses the non-recognition of his spiritual gifts. R3 and R2 were almost similar in their views but R2 is different from R3 only on the note that R3 centered on the area of music, which he complained was only hip-hop style. R4 believes the church had turned to a place where eye-service now reigns supreme. For R6 the reason for leaving was because there unchristian attitude in the church such as gossips and

backbiting. R4 is however, particular about the failure of leadership. Finally, R5 chooses not to make any comment and this suggests a great level of emotional hurt. It agrees with Corey (2013) who argues that “emotional trauma” is a major reason why members leave their churches.

Another important area of the findings of this research is on how long it took those members who left the church to leave. The data collected from the interviews shows that members left in different ways. But at the end, the researcher finds out that many of the respondents actually did not leave at once.

### **Finding on the Process of Members Leaving the Church**

R1	Of course, I didn't leave at once; I tried hard to stay but just can't.
R2	Well, I left over a period of time when I noticed that things cannot be improved
R3	I left the day I discovered that the leadership of the church are full of eye-service
R4	My leaving the church did not happen at once; I left over a period of time.
R5	I don't think I can remember how long it took me to finally leave the church
R6	I left at once after making a decision
R7	It did not happen at once. I left when I became frustrated about how things were handled by the leadership of the church
R8	My leaving process took more than four months hoping things will improve.
R9	It happened at once. I mean when I finally noticed eye service in the church
R10	It was a gradual process

From the above, R1, R2, R4, R7, R8, and R10 actually agree that their leaving process did not just happened at once. This means that they left over a period of time. This constitutes 60% of the leaving process among the respondents. However, R3, R6, and R9 agreed that they left at once after discovering that the church engaged in an “eye-service” kind of leadership. By eye-service the respondents were perhaps referring to hypocrisy. May for them the leaders were

not living up to their expectation. The leaders favor a particular some particular members over others for want of what the leaders expect to receive from such individuals. The economic and financial status of an individual plays a key role in an eye-service form of leadership. This also constitutes 30% of the leaving process. R5 on the other hand never remembered how long it took him to decide. This may suggest that this individual was patient enough but finally left when things were not improving. Those who belong to this category constitute 10% of the leaving process.

Based on the above analysis, it is conjecturable that the majority of those who actually left the church did so gradually. And those in this category are more than those who left in a sudden. Only one respondent could not say how long it took him to live. But again, it may mean that it took quite a long because of his enduring attitude. The significance of this percentage above is indicative of the fact that something could have been done to keep these people from leaving the church.

But did these members made formal complaints to the leadership of the church before they finally left the church? The data collected from the interviews shows they did but things were not still getting better. Below are the responses from the interviewees.

### **Finding on Leaders' Awareness of the plight of Members**

R1	Yes, I did speak with the head pastor and few of the church leaders but to no avail
R2	Of course I made several efforts to speak to the leadership of the church but I did not just see any change
R3	I never bordered to speak to anyone since I discovered negative acts myself.
R4	I spoke with my team leader as well as the assistant pastor but nothing was done
R5	I spoke with few elders in the church before I finally left
R6	I never spoke to anyone, I just left because I was fed-up
R7	Yes, I spoke with a colleague and my team leader before my departure.
R8	I only spoke with the assistant pastor twice.
R9	No I did not speak to anyone. I just left
R10	I spoke severally with the head pastor but there was no change.

From the above, 70% of the respondents actually spoke to at least one to those in the leadership of the church before they stopped going to church. For instance, R1, R2, R4, R5, R7, R8 and R10 all spoke to the leadership of the church. They all spoke with one person or the other before their departure. Only R3, R6 and R9 never bordered to speak to anyone. Again, they never spoke to anyone perhaps because they felt unsafe to share their grievances with people they had no trust on. This constitutes about 30% of those who left. This means that those who had left the church actually made several efforts to speak to at least one person about what is bordering them but it seems they did not see changes or they are not satisfied.

But are these members who left the church willing to return back to RCCG-JHA? The data collected from the respondents shows that some of those who left the church may be willing to return back if things improved. A few however, believe that their coming back is not possible even if things improved. Their responses are clearly indicated from the table below.



### **Finding on Members Willingness to Come Back**

R1	No, I have found another community of faith.
R2	Well, I don't think I will ever go back except the Holy Spirit leads
R3	I think I prefer worshipping God in my house now. I don't think I will ever go back to the church
R4	Maybe, but I don't think i will ever improve in RCCG-JHA
R5	If things improved? I (laughed) don't think so. Let's wait until then.
R6	I don't have anything to say for now in this area
R7	It depends, I mean, if the Pastor returns to his original self and drop the garment of ego, and pride that is currently killing the church
R8	Maybe/maybe not, it all depends on what the Holy Spirit says.
R9	I won't go back for any reason. I have said good-bye to the church
R10	I don't think so

From the above, it is clear that some of the respondents are willing to return to the church only if things can be improved. For instance, R2, R4, R5, R7 and R8 agree that they may return to the church if things get better. And this improvement is only possible for R2 and R8 if the Holy Spirit changes things for the church. The reference to the Holy Spirit suggests that for these two individuals, the solution to the problem in RCCG-JHA is beyond humans. However, they may be willing to return if things improve. Those who believe in this simply constitute 50% of the respondents that are willing to return to the church.

The laughter expressed by R5 may suggest that even though he may be willing to return if things improved; he does not, however, think this improvement would come. In the case of R1, R9 and R10, returning to the church seems not to be possible. Again, this constitutes 30% of the respondents. However, R3 now prefers not to attend any church, which is 10% of the respondents. This shows that he may not be willing to forget his experience in RCCG-JHA. Finally, the remaining 10%, in the person of R6 did not give any definite answer in this area. This may be as a result of deep hurt.

It is important to state that the church stands the chance of getting some of her members back if some necessary steps are immediately taken. These steps may form the basis of my recommendations in this research...

#### **4.4 Efforts made to remedy the Situation**

In response to this situation, the church's habitual approach was to ask what is wrong. Who is responsible? What do we do now? These were the questions asked by the Pastor. However, efforts made to work out a solution to these questions proved abortive. No definite solution to the declining factor of the church has been proffered. And this forms the central focus of this work.

During the church's minister's conference of 2012, the blame for people leaving the church was projected on the ministers and the board of trustees by the RCCG headquarters in Nigeria, during this period, one hundred people had left the church between late 2011 and December 2012 (RCCG-JHA Monthly Bulletin for January 2013:7). See below figure 2.1

BREAKDOWN OF ATTENDANCE REPORT					%CHANGE
YEAR	MALE (Age group- 15 and above)	FEMALE (Age group- 15 and above)	CHILDREN (age group:5- 14)	TOTAL	
2011	127	144	29	300	-
2012	91	94	15	200	33.3%
2013	66	74	10	150	25%

Figure 2.1

The vigorous continual decrease of congregational members as revealed in figure 2.1 shows that the RCCG-JHA was in a very serious crisis of losing members. From the above table; the church began to experience a decline from the year 2012 when the number of male decline was 36 which was 28% compared to the year 2011. The number of females decline also was 50 of which the percentage was 34.7 compared to year 2011. While the children also experienced a decline of 16 people which were about 55% compared to year 2011. It is obvious that the church lost more females and children than males in the year 2012.

This was what led to the urgent international conference of 2012, after which the situation continue to persist. (See Appendix A for details of the conference). During this conference, the General Overseer of RCCG, Pastor E. A. Adegboye directed his speech to the ministers in anger as to why people are leaving the church. Yet, the outcome of the conference did not give a definite solution to the declining problem of the church.

## **4.5 Evaluation and Conclusion**

I want to conclude on this chapter with the following notes. First, is that throughout this chapter, my effort has been to ascertain the reasons why members are leaving the RCCG-JHA church. In the first section, I discussed some theories and identified some general reasons why people leave their churches. In the second section, I explore in more specific terms some reasons that could account for the decline of membership in RCCG-JHA.

Here, the findings show that some of the reasons for the phenomenal decline in membership may include: lack of clear leadership vision, poor leadership style, lack of love, poor pastors-members relationship, tribalism, favoritism, emotional trauma of members, poor preaching and teaching of God's Word, poor ministerial/ social programs and non-recognition of members spiritual gifts. This conclusion was made possible by the method of semi-structured interview adopted.

It is also informative to note that from the ten persons interviewed during the course of this study, a few areas of general agreement and insight emerged with almost all the respondents cooperating and identifying the major factors that made them to leave the church. Many of them accept the fact that several steps were taken to correct the anomalies that had pitched tent with the church. Again, those efforts yielded no results. Hence, they had no choice but to leave the church. However, a greater number of them may be willing to return to the church if things improved. On this note, the church may stand the chance of regaining over 50% of her members.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

In this research, efforts have been made to discover the root causes of membership loss in RCCG-JHA, in the Netherlands over three years. It is revealed in this investigation that the decline of membership in RCCG-JHA that began from 2011 and has continued until date may be caused by some major reasons such as lack of clear leadership vision, poor leadership style, lack of love, poor pastors-members relationship, tribalism, favoritism, emotional trauma of members, poor preaching and teaching of God's Word, poor ministerial/ social programs and non-recognition of members spiritual gifts. Each of the respondents lamented on these factors that are mentioned above. Moreover, this was the position of nearly all individuals that were duly interviewed in course of carrying out the research.

The research started with a brief history of migration and migrant churches in the Netherlands. The historical circumstances surrounding the establishment of RCCG-JHA was also briefly discussed in terms of its purpose of establishment, year of its establishment, its missionary activities, and the astronomical growth that followed thereafter. This was necessary to established the fact that the decline of church membership in the church was a latter development and as such calls for urgent response.

In order to have a better understanding of the problem under investigation, a review of literatures on theories and reasons for decline of church membership from a general perspective were considered. These theories brought to bear some reasons that were pertinent to the situation in RCCG-JHA. In fact, the findings from different respondents confirmed that there was a strong link between the reasons enumerated by these theories and the ones given by former members of the church.

Again, the findings of the research were made possible by the methodological approach adopted in this research. This methodological approach was a semi-structured interview and was necessary for gathering primary information. Ultimately, the research proffers necessary steps to be taken as a way of attempting to arrest the decline of membership in the church. To make these recommendations more reliable, a theological reflection is also given at the last phase of the research. Again, this was necessary, because the researcher is a student of theology and he believes that the problem of membership decline is primarily a theological one. This is helpful particularly in developing strategies for making church members stay longer and steps for reclaiming some of the former church members.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, it is important to make the following recommendations:

### **5.2.1 Installation of Reconciliation Committee**

It is clear from the findings of this research that some people leave church because they are hurt in one way or the other. Duncan (2004) who enlists “inner hurt” as one of his reasons why people leave church made this point very clear. This was also the position of Corey (2013) who believes that “emotional trauma” and “unresolved conflict” could make members to leave the church. Pritchard (2011) may also be right by stating in very strong terms that people leave church because of “damaging experiences”. The responses gathered in course of this research indicate clearly that some of the members who left the church did so because they are hurt in one way or the other.

On this note, there may be need for the church to constitute a five-man reconciliation committee to reconcile all aggrieved members and parties in the church. Perhaps, this committee

could comprise of two elderly members and three youths, all nominated from the audience. This committee may be saddled with the primary responsibility of ensuring that potential crises are adequately attended to and possibly averted before it degenerates to serious ones. It may also be necessary for the committee to visit those members that have withdrawn membership and to have personal interactions with them. This may promote an atmosphere for reconciliation and forgiveness of which the end result will be the return of those members.

### **5.2.2 Re-organization of Church Offices**

Again, there is absolute need for a restructuring of the church officers. The complaints against some of the church leaders as stated from the findings of this research are indicative of the fact that there might be need for a restructuring of church officers in RCCG-JHA. Corey's (2013) position is relevant at this point when he identified "unskilled teachers" as one major reason why people get tired of church and decide to leave the church. Duncan (2004) again comes to the fore by identifying "poor leadership", and inability to adopt "different styles" as reasons that make people to leave their church.

Maybe, RCCG-JHA could have some lessons to learn from these authors. S.A.K. Olaleye (2012:134-150) in his analysis of factors that are necessary for numerical church growth identifies "effective workforce" as one major tool to achieve this. I agree with him that effective workforce is necessary for church growth. In other words, the lack of it is capable of causing a phenomenal decline of church membership. Thus, my recommendation in case is that the church may consider restructuring its workforce. This may include assigning offices to individuals based on their gifting and professionalism and even creating new offices. For example, the respondent

who complained that he was not given the opportunity to join the music ministry could have been incorporated if this was done.

Again, I am not sure if this could stop the decline of membership in the church. But at least it could reduce it. Overall, it could give a sense of belonging to those that have been neglected for years.

### **5.2.3 Regular assessment or Evaluation**

It has been observed from the findings of this research that some of the members who left the church complained of poor pastor-members' relationship, poor leadership style and poor preaching. This was the position of almost all respondents that were duly interviewed in the course of this research. Duncan (2013) is quite correct in his observation that "poor leadership" is one major reason why people leave church.

Rick Warren (2003:19) is even more explicit about this very fact when he argues that "pastors are the most strategic change agents to deal with the problems in our society". By this, Warren does not only see the pastors as leaders in the church but also as leaders of the society as well. In other words, pastors have a major role to play in bringing about change in church and society. This is also applicable to the situation in RCCG-JHA. Whether, it is directly stated or not, the pastor of the church may share part of the blame for what happens in this church.

Unfortunately, in most cases, the pastor may not even be aware when members are becoming dissatisfied with his leadership, preaching, and relationship with them. Thus, there may be need for the pastor to occasionally conduct a routine assessment on his leadership style, preaching, administration, and relationship with members. This assessment or evaluation could be carried out periodically. That is, monthly, quarterly, or annually depending on how often they want this assessment to be done. This personal assessment may be prepared in form of



assessment or evaluation form and shared to members in order for them to objectively evaluate the pastor. The outcome of this assessment in terms of the Pastor's leadership successes and failures could be noted for improvement. Obviously, this could be a major breakthrough for the Pastor to improve wherever he needs to do so.

#### **5.2.4 Good Ministerial / Social Services**

One of the main complaints of the respondents of this research as indicated above is that they left RCCG-JHA because of poor ministerial/social services. Again, Olaleye (2012) points it clearly that "specific programs" and "good social ministry" are viable tools for achieving numerical growth in a church. In other words, the lack of good ministerial/ social services or programs could lead to mass exodus of members. The ministerial and social activities of the church dictate to a large extent whether members would want to stay in a church or not. Duncan (2004) also sees good ministerial and social services as necessary tools for keeping members from leaving the church.

On the ministerial services could include prayer ministries, bible study ministries, youth ministries, women ministries, music ministries, etc. At least this could go a long way in providing the needed responses to members' need. For example, those who have their expectations that their problems could be solved by members praying together may feel the sense of belonging when they realize that people are praying for them.

It is important to remark that the RCCG-JHA is already doing a lot in this respect as indicated in the section of the ministerial activities of the church. However, more needs to be done by incorporating social services in the activities of the church. This is necessary to meet the financial needs of members who are in need. While the church is not totally a charity organization, it has the responsibility of at least caring for her members whenever the need arises. A special department on welfare may be constituted to ensure that new members are

followed up to ensure that they are not in any helpless situation. This could invite more members into the church when it is properly managed. This tradition was common in the early church according to Acts 4:32-37.

### **5.3 Theological Reflections**

From all that have been said in this research, what theological lessons are there for us to learn? And why is this so vital? It is important to state at this point that there are important theological lessons to learn from this research particularly in respect to understanding the concepts of church, leadership and love.

#### **5.3.1 The Need for a Theology of the Church**

The first theological issue that requires reflection from all our findings is the need for a proper understanding of the concept of the church. This is vital because a poor understanding of the true concept of the church as taught in Scripture may most likely lead to serious conflicts between pastors and members. This may happen, when both the pastor and members lack the right understanding of the concept of the church. Milne (1998:18) is in order by arguing that “getting doctrine right is the key to getting everything else right”.

The overall complaints of the respondents in this research are suggestive of the fact that individuals may easily misunderstand what the church stands for. And this could account on the one hand, for the complaints of those who have left the church, and on the other hand, the supposedly poor leadership and poor pastor-members relationship of the church, particularly in RCCG-JHA.

A right theology of the church begins with an understanding of the origin and founder of the church as recorded in the gospel according to Matthew 16:18; 18:17. In these scriptures, Matthew shows a marked interest in Jesus’ teachings concerning the church. Matthew is the only

evangelist who uses the word church (*ekklesia*) at all. The first occurrence is in Jesus' response to Peter's confession. Deji Ayegboyin (2004:98) commenting on Jesus' statement states that "here Matthew shows that Christ instituted The Church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail". He notes further that in the second instance, Matthew was concerned about "the authority and order in the church in the local church-the gathering of two or three in the name of Christ". G.D. Kilpatrick cited by Deji A. (2004:98) contends that Matthew's gospel was written specifically to guide the life of the early church. This view may be underscored by Matthew's liturgical interest (worship), exercise of church discipline, emphasis on ethical living worthy of the community of believers and the hall mark of the church which is evangelism.

The biblical images used in describing the church such as: the people of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the buildings of God, the kingdom of God, the family of God, the flock of God, the vineyard of God, (Milne 1998:260-65), all point to the fact that the church is a unique community of God's people, love, unity, faith, etc. George W. Peter (1981:145) in commenting on the characteristics of the New Testament church sees it as "a community of liberality, freely sharing its substance. It was a community of fellowship in word, prayer and deed. It was a community of equality; a congregation; a body of believers, of disciples".

The church as Rick Warren (2003:16) describes it as "a body, not a business. It is an organism, not an organization". It was for a proper understanding of the theology of the church as body and organism that Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1Corinthians 12:12-30 admonishing them to see each other as different but equal members of the same community. Jesus Christ is head of the church and individual members are different parts of the church. This understanding is crucial for all pastors and members of the church. A proper teaching on the theology of the church may be necessary in RCCG-JHA.

### **5.3.2 The Need for a Theology of Leadership**

The second theological issue that requires reflection from the overall findings in this research is the need for a theology of leadership. This is vital because a poor leadership vision may make membership to express dissatisfaction over the leadership of a church and as a result eventually leave the church. On the other hand, a good and clear leadership vision can lead to success in church leadership.

A large part of the Bible account speaks of God's call to leadership to people in different settings but with the ultimate goal of glorifying him. George Barna (1993:122) has found that what facilitates "...significant spiritual development within their people is the claim of theology of leadership by those pastors". It is already clear from the findings of this research that many of those who left RCCG-JHA did so because they felt dissatisfied with the leadership. They complained of poor leadership in the church. Thus, a theology of leadership is necessary to reflect upon.

Of course, there are several biblical characters that could fit into this discussion but may be Moses and Jesus could be used as examples here? As a leader, Moses' vision and mission were quite clear; "to bring the people of God out of the land of Egypt and to lead them into the Promise land" (Exodus 3:7-10). O.G. Adetunji (2010:75) commenting on Moses puts it that it was the call of Yahweh that made him Yahweh's servant. Although, the Israelites, (his followers) murmured against his leadership (Exodus 14:11ff; Numbers 11:4-5). His followers could disbelieve him and even struggle with him for power (Numbers 12:16). He died without setting his foot on the land that is the goal of his labours. Yet, he was focused and a clear leadership vision.

From Moses, all leaders can learn the qualities of humility, trust, integrity, obedience, love for people, delegation of responsibility, enthusiasm, accountability, equipping others so that after leaving, the work could continue (Exodus 18:13-26 and Acts 6:17) . Adetunji (2010) also notes that from Moses, “all Christian leaders should learn the quality of a strong, consistent, and persistent prayer life that would continually sharpen the leaders’ vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationship with men”.

Another most important example for us is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus taught servant kind of leadership. This form of servant leadership is clearly defined by the Lord Jesus when in admonishing his disciples, he emphatically said:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45; Also see Matthew 20:24-28 NIV)

It is clear from the above quotation that leadership in the church does not come by lording over people but by serving them. Interestingly, Jesus did not only teach his disciples on how to be servant leaders, he himself demonstrated this aspect of leadership by washing his disciples’ feet with water as well as cleaned them with a towel as recorded in the account of John 13:1-10. A theology of leadership insists that all leaders should be servants and not lords. It is also expected that a servant leader should be ready to lay down his life for his followers, John 10:10; 15:13. This style of servant leadership was different from the secular leadership that was in place at that time.

### **5.3.3 The Need for a Theology of Agape Love**

The final theological issue that requires reflection from the overall findings in this research is the need for a theology of agape. This is vital because the church is a community of love, hence a lack of it may lead to neglect of members and even breed tribalism and sentiments.

Wayne Jackson may be right when he qualifies “members’ hypocritical and judgmental attitudes” as two major reasons why people leave church.

According to J.P. Baker (1998:398-399), “agape love” which is Godlike love, stands in total contrast to all pagan ideas of love in a fallen world. Agape love seeks for people’s highest good (1Cor. 13:4-7). Its source is God, and its pattern and inspiration is Christ (1John 4:7-19). Agape love values other persons as worthy ends in themselves, and does not merely use them as means to an end. Whether in relation to God or man, however, its keynote is not merely emotion, but devotion, shown in commitment and measured by self-giving, practical action and sacrifice (John 14:1, 24; 15:12-14).

Perhaps the chief theological reflection in this work is the practice of agape love. By ‘agape love’, I am referring to the unlimited divine love that God demonstrated to us in Christ. Though humanly speaking it may be difficult for us to practice this kind of love in totality. Notwithstanding, we could learn from the experience of the early church. Agape love occupies a very central position in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. And this is evident in the teachings of Jesus Himself and the Apostles. For example, in capturing the importance and power of agape love, the Apostle Paul wrote thus:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8, NIV)

From the above quotation, it is clear that agape love is the kind of love that sacrifices for the benefits of others not on the basis of merit of the recipient but on the basis of the value that the giver has for the recipient. Agape love is the kind of sacrificial love that God shows to us and expects us to do likewise. It is not totally unconnected with the concept of agape love that Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:43-47 to “love our enemies and do good to them that hate us”.

The importance of agape love leaves with us a very huge responsibility of loving everyone equally irrespective of our tribal and cultural differences. Agape love is incompatible with hatred, tribalism, prejudice, favoritism, quarrels and enmity. This point was correctly captured by the great Apostle Paul who in describing what agape love means wrote thus:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV)

For the Pastor and the leaders of RCCG-JHA, agape love is necessary for their day to day relationship and interaction with members. In fact, it would amount to serious hypocrisy if one tries to lead a congregation without having love for the people he or she is called to lead. It is the duty of the Pastor and the leaders of the church to show agape love to their members even when they feel they have offended them. After all, we were all sinners and sinners we are when Christ died for us. The love of Christ should compel us to do the same to others.

For the members who felt offended in one way or the other and decided to leave the church, they also have the responsibility to show agape love to those they claimed offended them. For sure, agape love does not keep records of wrong. Hence, it is unchristian for members of a local church to withdraw their membership simply because someone offended them. After all, the Scripture quoted above also says that we should love our enemies as well as do good to them. There should be room for forgiveness and reconciliation. It is my belief that the demonstration of agape love among members and leaders of RCCG-JHA may just be one main step to minimizing the mass exodus of members.

It is necessary to conclude this section by saying that these theological issues reflected upon may go a long way in tackling the problem of decline of membership not just in RCCG-JHA but also in other similar African Pentecostal Churches in the Netherlands. A prospective

area of further study may be to investigate the “Impact of African Pentecostal Churches on the Social Life of their Members in the Netherlands.



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## **Appendix A**

Details of the 2012 Minister's Conference, which was held on the 10th of December 2012 at the  
RCCG-JHA Conference Hall

### **Programme**

10:00 Prayer and Praise

10:30 Holy Communion

11:00-12:00 Partnership- Key to Expanding Christ's Kingdom in the Netherlands

12:00-13:00 Prayer Session 1: Unity Among the Brethren in the Church

13:00-13:45 Break/Refreshment

13:45-14:45 Workshop 1: Implementing Our Evangelization

14:45-15:15 Prayer Session 2: Prayer for Abiding Fruit

15:15-16:30 Workshop 2: The Situation of the Church for the last two years.

16:30-17:30: Recapitulating the main Points & Final Prayer Session.

The Programme Manager was Pastor Regina Dururu from The RCCG Headquarters,  
Lagos Nigeria

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questionnaire**

#### **(i) Context**

- 1) Where do you come from?
- 2) Where is your current residence?
- 3) What is your profession or occupation?
- 4) Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

#### **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

- 1) When did you join RCCG-JHA?
- 2) Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?
- 3) What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?
- 4) What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?
- 5) Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to that expectations?
- 6) Could you please tell me why you left the church?
- 7) Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?
- 8) Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?
- 9) Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?
- 10) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

## **(Appendix C)**

### **Interviews with 10 former church members**

The ten respondents are labeled as follow: Interview One, R1, Interview Two, R2, Interview Three, R3 and Interview 4, R4, interview Five, R5, interview Six, R6, interview Seven, R7, interview Eight, R8, interview Nine, R9 and interview Ten, R10. The “R” stands for respondent.

#### **Interview One, R1**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

##### **i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R1:** I am a Nigerian. I was born in Nigeria.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R1:** North of Amsterdam.

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R1:** I worked with Eures as a shelf

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious / Christian background?

**R1:** Well, I was born into a family of unbelievers. When I was 4, my parents left me in Lagos because they had to find a house in Ekiti State. They left me to my grandmother who was a Christian. She taught me how to write and also read Bible. She was the one who introduced me to one of her friends through whom I came to Europe.

##### **ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R1:** (Pause for a while) I joined the church since 2010

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA

**R1:** I was a worker in the church. I worked in the music department

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R1:** Well, what I know was that the missionary activities of the church are to build lives. This was written clearly on the four corners of the church. It is an inscription you will see clearly when you first enter the church. This was my first attraction to the church.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R1:** Uh! (Pause for a while) Ehm! To me, the expectations may be differ, but I expected to have found a community of faith where felt needs can be met both spiritually and physically. I believe others too will share similar expectations to mine because this is the whole reason why we go to church.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R1:** (Smiles) Sorry, mine is not to judge or evaluate but to me, it seems the church started very well. But fall short of the expectations along the line. It started gradually when things began to sink. Church activities no longer going as before. Even the members' commitment to church work began to decline. This was because those expectations of building lives and raising leaders were no longer there anymore.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R1:** To me, I left because the leadership of the church was not doing what they suppose to do. The leaders suppose to be the rallying point of the church; they suppose to show love and care to all members irrespective of their status. And again, the leaders suppose to listen to advice, suggestions and corrections from church members. I am confused over the emotions I feel. Sometimes, I looked back and I am glad to have left Jesus House- Amsterdam. I enjoy the new freedoms I have in Christ and relief from the burdens I was carrying for many years while in the church. At other times I suffer the pain over the lost years and lost friendships. The day I finally decided to leave, I was so beaten down and confused that I did not know what is true to hold on to versus what is false to discard. The reason was that the leadership of the church does not welcome

dialogue, advice, evaluation, and questions from church members. I noticed the leadership of the church feels threatened by any diverse opinions whether from church members or church workers. People are discouraged from asking hard questions. The rule is, don't ask tough questions because it might offend the leaders. Many at times, disagreement with the pastor is considered disloyalty and is virtually equal to disobeying God. Spiritual language is used to disguise the manipulation that is going on in the church. Questioners are labeled rebellious, insubordinate, and disruptive to the harmony of the body. When I noticed all these remain persistence, I have no choice that to live.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R1:** Of course, I didn't leave at once, I tried hard to stay but just can't. I thought things will improve but I was wrong. At a stage, I develop this notion that I come to worship God, not human. But how can you worship God in an atmosphere where there is no Unity? To cap it up, it took a while before I finally leave.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R1:** (Answered very sharp) yes of course, I did speak with the head pastor and few of the church leaders. I even visited them at home to let them know that the way things are changing fast in the

church will affect the church negatively. I remembered vividly that I spoke with the head pastor about the complaint of a brother who spoke to me about the sudden change of attitude of the head pastor to him and the pastor promised to call the brother and talk to him. Three weeks later, I asked the brother if the pastor had spoken with him and he said no. I was sad in my spirit. I tried but to no avail

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R1:** (Smiles) No, I have found another community of faith. I now worship in a new church not too far from my house. For now, I'm happy in my new place of whorship.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R1:** Ehmmm! No, I don't think so

## **Interview Two, R2**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

### **(i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R2:** I am a Nigerian. I was born in Nigeria.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R2:** Amsterdam Zuid.

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R2:** I worked with Burger King

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

**R2:** (Raised up his head to recollect) well, I used to be a Baptist. In the Baptist church a great focus was on sound doctrines but not so much of the life of the Holy Spirit. Besides, in the Baptist, the Pentecostal touch is greatly missing upon the members Earlier on. So when I heard of the Pentecostal church, I was drawn into it, and I felt spiritually drawn into their ways.

### **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R2:** I think it was 2010 when my friend invited me to a programme in the church.

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R2:** I was part of the leadership team as well help in other departments when the need be.

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R2:** (Pause for a while) what I can remember was that the church started with the aim of transforming the immediate community with the Word of God. From the teachings during my early days in the church, I learnt that the transformation of the immediate community is connected with showing love and care to those who are in great need. To be frank, the church really worked towards achieving this missionary activity during my first few months.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R2:** For me, I was not expecting anything other than what the missionary activities stand to represent. Besides this, I was expecting a place where the undiluted Word of God is being preached and heard. This is my own opinion; I can't tell what others are expecting.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R2:** Well, like I said before, during my early few months in the church, the church was very interesting and the zeal to always be in the church was there. In fact, I remembered vividly that during those days, I use to dream and think of being in the church always. I think that was because the church did not fall short of my expectations.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R2:** (Nod his head) that was a big question Mike! But I will try to answer. Let me start this way, I left because I was tired about the old ways of doing things in the church. The division of labour which we have seen in the early days was no longer there. Pastor's favorites were the only ones who use to decide the affairs of the church. Many of us were no longer useful anymore. The pastor does not share pulpit anymore. This habit became so thick that many of us could not take it anymore. This is what pushed me out of the church.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time...?

**R2:** (Cut in) Well, I left over a period of time when I noticed that things cannot be improved. It was a long battle. The more I try hard to cope the more frustrated I become. It was not easy Mike. The day I left, in fact, I didn't get myself during the first few weeks of not going to church. But I gradually passed over it. So you see, I never left the church at once.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R2:** Of course I made several efforts to speak to the leadership of the church but I did not just see any change. I even went further by talking to them one by one, yet they couldn't just do anything about the situation, some of them were confused and could not even say a word to me. What they say is "God is in control". This is what I hear from most of them always.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?



R2: (Pause for a while) Well, I don't think I will ever go back except the Holy Spirit leads. Besides, right now, I have a place where I worship temporarily; I don't want to get too involved again in church activities because of my experience at RCCG-JHA. However, If God speaks to me to return, then I know is for a purpose. Till then, for now, I don't have the intention of going back to the church.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

R1: Well....well..ehm! I think the church need a revival. First, an internal revival among the leadership of the church. Then an open revival that will cut across leaders and workers. With this, the church may revive again

### **Interview Three, R3**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

#### **(i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R3:** I am a Nigerian. I was born in Nigeria.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R3:** Amsterdam Zuid.

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R3:** Not working for now.

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

**R3:** I was born and raised up in a Pentecostal home. My parents have been members of Redeemed Christian Church of God since early 70s. I have also been a member ever since I was born.

#### **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R3:** I joined the church in the year 2011

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R3:** (Sorry, I don't want to say much on this) but I worked in one of the departments in the church.

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R3:** Well, it is written all over the nooks and crannies of the church. That is “Proclamation of the gospel to all nations”. This is it. Taking the gospel to every corner of the earth. Just in accordance with Acts 1:18.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R3:** Well, I can’t answer for all the members, but my expectation is to be in the gathering of saints. That’s all.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R3:** Uhhmm! I think I saw what I was expecting when I join the church, and I left when those things were no longer there. During the early days, my expectations were fulfilled. But as time passes-by, things began to change and I no longer feel comfortable.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R3:** No room for me to utilize my God-given talent. My wife and I did not leave the church with dissatisfactory mindset, rather, we left because we knew we were gifted with talents and ministries but feel restrained from exercising them. My wife and I were excluded from singing on the Worship Team because; apparently we did not fit the “hip hop” music image the church wants to project. I don’t think this describes an entitlement mentality. We’re just frustrated at not being allowed to use our spiritual gifts in our local church, and to put it bluntly, we’re really lonely. We see ourselves as victims of a church culture that is promoting an atmosphere to attract the younger of society at the expense of neglecting the older age groups in the church. This was not so when we first came to the church. But things have changed over some time.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R3:** I left the day I discovered that the leadership of the church was full of eye-service and was not ready to give older generation a chance in the worship team because we were very few. This is not encouraging and my wife and I decided to leave. Although, we have been struggling with this issue for long but we finally decided the day I heard the pastor telling the worship leader that the church is in the era of younger generations.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R3:** I never border to speak to anyone since I discovered negative acts myself. It wasn’t ear-saying. But what I witnessed myself. So you see, there is no need to speak to anyone about my departure anymore.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R3:** No, I can’t. I don’t think my wife would want to go back either. I think I prefer worshipping God in my house now. I don’t think I will ever go back to the church.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R3:** No Mike. The only thing is that I never bear any grudge with anyone in the church. I left with a clean heart. I mentioned all these just for you to achieve the purpose of this interview.

#### **Interview Four, R4**

##### **(i) Context**

The interview took place after work in his office.

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R4:** I am a Nigerian. I was born in Nigeria.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R4:** Amsterdam Zuid-Oost.

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R4:** I worked as a supervisor in one of the hotels here in Amsterdam.

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

**R4:** (Sighs) No big deal about my Christian background. I became born-again six years ago. Shortly after, I attended Baptismal Class and later got baptized by immersion. Since then, I have been serving in the house of God.

##### **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R4:** I first attend in the year 2010 when someone invited me to a programme. But I became full member in the early 2011.

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R4:** I served in the protocol department

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R4:** Yes, it is, raising leaders that will influence the nations positively with the Word of God. This is what we were thought. And this is what I too belief and hold on to.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R4:** Ehmmmm! Well, what I expect was a place where problems can be shared and solved. A place where we can rejoice with those who are rejoicing and join hands in prayer with those who are sad. Although the church worked in line with these expectations through-out the year 2011.

**Mike:** Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R4:** Ehmmmm! I think the church was doing well until certain stage when things no longer work again. The love is no longer there, the care suddenly disappeared. Leaders no longer treat members equally anymore. What I mean is that, the leaders now prefer to attend to some people almost all the times when others will wait for days before they could see the pastor.

**Mike:** Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R4:** Well, there is lot of reasons why I left the church, but the major reason was that leadership eye service had become increasingly rampart in the church. Our pastor no longer mingles freely with some of us. Even seeing him for counseling became almost impossible. If eventually we manage to see him, he always is in haste. It becomes obvious that he does not like some of us anymore. This is why I lost appetite for the church.

**Mike:** Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R4:** No, my leaving the church did not happen at once, I left over a period of time. It was a decision that was building upon gradually. Not sudden at all.

**Mike:** Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R4:** Yes, I spoke severally with my team leader as well as the assistant pastor but nothing was done about it. I told them that the attitude of the pastor towards some of us is not encouraging. But they wouldn't do much about it because the head pastor was involved.

**Mike:** Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R4:** Ah! Well, maybe. But I don't think things will ever improve in RCCG-JHA. Many members have left and we do see ourselves here in the streets of Amsterdam. We do talk about our various experiences and none of us agreed things will ever improve. So, I don't think I will ever go back to the church.

**Mike:** Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R4:** (Think for a while) no, nothing else. Thanks Mike.

## **Interview Five, R5**

### **(i) Context**

The interview took place in the respondent home.

**Mike:** Where do you come from?

**R5:** I am a Nigerian. I was born in Nigeria.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R5:** Amsterdam.

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R5:** Just finished my Master programme in one of the Universities here in Amsterdam. Still waiting to get employed.

## **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R5:** I joined 2009

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R5:** I worked as a worker in the when I was in the church

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R5:** Uhhmm! From the onset, I think the church has unique Missionary activities. Part of it is maximizing potentials and building skills. What I'm saying is that, the church has lovely programmes that centered on bringing out potentials in people as well helping them to build more on their God-given skills. To me, those are what I know to be the Missionary activities of the church.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R5:** (Pause a little) Ehm! I think people have different expectations of going to church. But for me, I expected to have found a place where I can share my problem and get a good advice. My expectations were to have being in the gathering of saints where I can get quality advice in order to face future challenges as well become strong for the things of God.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R5:** Uhhmm! Well, it is not mine to judge or evaluate the activities of the church. But I believe the church once lived up to that expectation. That was around 2011 and the early 2012. Those were the old days when activities were booming in the church. When people were ready to be part of one team or the other. But not anymore, those days has gone. The glory of those days has passed by.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R5:** (Bow down his head) Mike, sorry, I won't be able to help you in this area. I left due to personal reasons; I don't want to talk about it please.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R5:** No, I never made up my mind at once. But don't think I can remember how long it takes me to finally leave the church. Maybe weeks or even months. I can't remember vividly. But I know it wasn't matter of days.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R5:** Yes, I spoke with few elders in the church before I finally leave. Not all of them, but some of them. I spoke with those I usually relate with. But they too could not help the situation. All effort to change things proved abortive.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R5:** (Calls my name in a very funny manner) Mike... If things improves? (Laughs) I don't think so. Let's wait until then. I don't think things can ever improve in that church. This is because, before I left, things had gone from bad to worse. The situation was very bad to the extent that people were leaving almost every week.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R5:** Uhmm! Let me see.....no, I don't think so Mike.

## **Interview Six, R6**

### **(i) Context**

The interview took place at the respondent's home.

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R6:** I came from Surinam.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R6:** I lived in Amsterdam Noord

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R6:** Uhmm! I have no stable work for now.

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

**R6:** No, I don't have any Christianity background until I first came to Netherlands in the early 90s. It was one of my Nigerian friends who introduced me to a church. Since then I got baptized and began to work for the Lord.

## **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R6:** I think..... 2011

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R6:** I worked in the ushering department.

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R6:** Well, I can't recollect everything vividly again, but I think it's all about spreading the Word of God. The mission of the church was clearly bold when we became committed. That was the passion to preach good tidings. This has been my area of calling.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R6:** (Calm).... My expectation was to have been in a church where there is no cultural difference. A place where one culture would not be placed above another in the ways they do things. A place where Dutch and English language would be the medium of instruction. This had been my expectation.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R6:** (Think for a while)... Yes, the church had lived up to that expectations but could not maintain it. When I joined the church, everything was in order. No discrimination of any sort. No language intimidation. We all do things in common then.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R6:** I left because the church has lost focus. It has become a place where gossip, backbiting and all sort of illicit behavior now reign supreme. Discrimination had become the order of the day. All sort of quarrel among the church members now rooted in the church. Almost all Sunday services, you will see church members fighting for one reason or the other just immediately after the service. The messages no longer play any role in the lives of the members.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R6:** Yes, I left at once after making a decision to leave. All this while, I never imagine myself leaving the church. But when things had gone beyond control, I have no choice than to leave at once.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R6:** No, I never speak to anyone; I just left because I was fed-up. Tell me Mike, of what use speaking with people again when things were very obvious. Those that I could have spoken with were living witness to what is happening in the church. Yet, they could not do anything about it. So, there is no point speaking with them again before my departure.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R6:** Well... Mike, I don't have anything to say for now in this area. Just look at it this way, ever since I left the church. I have remained churchless. What I mean is that I have never been to any church for almost two years now.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R6:** (Smiles) Nothing much Mike. I love been in the midst of Nigerians. Even if I don't return to the church again, I will still look for another Nigerian church around when the time comes.

### **Interview Seven, R7**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

#### **(i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R7:** I am a Kenyan, I came from Kenya.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R7:** Amsterdam Central Area

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R7:** I worked with McDonalds

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

**R7:** I was about 13 years old when I got the Gospel in my local language. I loved reading stories and I found it very interesting, not knowing that several years later I was going to become a disciple of Jesus. Here I am today.

#### **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R7:** I joined in the year 2011 after attending a workshop in the church.

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?



**R7:** I was a worker in the church.

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R7:** I think it's all about preaching the Good News and building relationships. The later has to do with meeting people and sharing experiences together. I remembered the church once had a lovely programme which they tagged: "meet someone". This was a lovely programme. We do it twice a year. It's like cocktail party where you will interact freely with new people.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R7:** When I first join the church. I expected to have found a community of faith where we can study the Word of God together and then act on it. I expected to have been in a community of faith where I can learn more about the Bible.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R7:** (Answered sharply) yes of course, the church started very well. Until a certain stage when pride and ego boast set in among the leaders. Those love and caring attitude just disappeared into the thin air. The leaders no longer want to socialize with some church members anymore after church service. This is when the church began to fall short of the expectations.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R7:** It's simple Mike. I left because the church is no longer use to be what it used to be. The fire is no longer there. The spirit of unity just.... (Used fingers demonstration) disappeared. People no longer feel the connection again. Each time, I sat down and ponder over the Days of glory. When the church is so strong. Even to the extent that we have programmes for all caliber of people coming to the church. But all these lovely ideas just fade off. I became so weak in my spirit. This was why I left.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R7:** Not really...It was not happened at once. I left when I became frustrated about how things were handled by the leadership of the church. I left when no one is ready to listen to advice or correction.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R7:** Sure, I spoke with a colleague and my team leader before my departure. Even some of them were tired as at then. They too were complaining bitterly.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R7:** (Reflect for a while) It depends; that will be possible if the leadership of the church is willing to change. I mean return to its original self and drop the garment of ego boast that is currently killing the church. When this happens, then I can consider going back.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R7:** Nothing else Mike. But I hope I have been able to help you a bit.

## **Interview Eight, R8**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

### **(i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R8:** I am a Nigerian, I was born in Nigeria.

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R8:** Amsterdam Bijlmer

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R8:** I just got a temporary job with one Café around

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious/ Christian background?

**R8:** Well, I became a Christian in 2007. After I saw the movie ‘Passion of the Christ’ I prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, if you really forgive sins, show me and forgive me.’ That night I had a dream. There was a man dressed in white who said to me, ‘Give yourself as a sacrifice and I will raise you from the dead and give you new life. At that moment, I gave myself to Jesus and saw my life as a sacrifice. Immediately after, I opened my eyes and I realized that I was resurrected from the dead, without knowing how. I later got baptized and became His follower.

### **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R8:** I joined sometimes around 2010

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R8:** During my days in the church. I worked in the technical department

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R8:** Ehmm! It’s all about extending and expanding the Word of God. That is preaching the gospel to all nations.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R8:** Mike, do you know what? Honestly I was expecting to have been in a place where I can confidently face all challenges with the help of fellow brethren who profess Christ as their Lord and Savior. A place where I can prayerfully get solutions to all problems with the help of fellow brethren joining faith together.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R8:** Yes, I really enjoined it. I mean when I first become a committed member. Things were very in good order. Then, it was a lovely atmosphere. Not anymore.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R8:** Tribal difference had reflected in the attitude of both the leaders and the congregations. During Sunday service, people now prefer to sit with those they are in good terms with so that they can gossip about others. One day, I over-heard one member telling another that he will soon slap someone in the church. Virtually on every service day, you will hear one negative story or the other. This was not why I joined the church in the first place. When those qualities I saw from the start disappeared, I have no choice than to leave.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R8:** No, I never left at once, frankly speaking Mike; it took more than four months hoping things will improve. But I was wrong. That was when I finally leave.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R8:** Ehm! Yes, I spoke with the assistant pastor. I remembered I did speak with him twice. But the situation was beyond him. The man too was helpless.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R8:** (Nod his head) Maybe/maybe not, it all depends on what the Holy Spirit says. For now, I don't think so Mike.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

R8: Not really!

## **Interview One, R1**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

### **i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R9:** I came from Nigeria

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R9:** I live here in Amsterdam

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R9:** Ehmmmm! No stable work for now.

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious / Christian background?

**R9:** In early May of 2003 I decided that I'd attend a church service programme with a friend. I figured this would be like going to church but not quite as weird, and I should at least see what this church have got to offer. The service wasn't as weird as I thought it would be, although there was a lot of singing which I didn't enjoy at the time. I wasn't quite sure that I agreed with what they were singing about! But when the speaker gave his short message something that he said resonated with me. He talked about "Rivers of Living Water". I realized that message was meant for me and decided immediately that nothing would stop me from accepting Christ. So when the time of alter came, I did not waste time. I quickly jumped to the front. That was it! I felt an instant change in me. Ever since then, my life has never remained the same.

## **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R9:** I joined around October 2011.

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R9:** I was a worker in the church. That is what I can say Mike.

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R9:** (Gushhh!) Well, what I can remember now is raising leaders and building lives for the work of God. The church centered then on the missionary activities of raising leaders by organizing series of conference and events.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R9:** Uhmm! Mike, you need to understand that different people with different expectations. I mean people have different reasons of coming to church. But my expectation is not more than praying together with fellow Christians as well shared the Word of God with them. This is because; I wanted to prepare myself for my future ministerial work.

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R9:** Ehmm! Well, I can't just conclude on that. But during my early days in the church, I would say yes, the church lived up to the expectations and we were very happy. This time I was talking about Mike, you need to be there, no one will tell you that th Spirit of God rested upon the church. But that spirit had disappeared now.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R9:** You see, I don't even know where to start from. But what I can say is that the leaders no longer pay attention to the spiritual well being of the members. It was not a day, week or even month's stuff. It all started like a child's play. Before we know it Mike, the situation had gone beyond control. There were enmity between church members and church leaders. Tell me Mike, how can you sit under the ministration of someone you are not in good term with? This is it. I just couldn't stand it. So I have to leave.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R9:** No, It happened at once. I mean when I finally noticed eye service in the church. That day was very bad Mike. I could not just imagine that eye service can be so strong even among those we look up to as our father in the Lord. Mike, I wouldn't want to continue beyond this. Please don't be offended.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R9:** No Mike, I did not speak to anyone. I just left. These things were obvious Mike; I don't have to speak to anyone again. You don't even know who to trust or not to trust again in the church.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

**R9:** (Sighs) I won't go back for any reason. I have said good-bye to the church.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**R9:** No Mike!

## **Interview Ten, R10**

My interview with him took place in his house here in Amsterdam.

### **i) Context**

Mike: Where do you come from?

**R10:** I'm a Nigerian

Mike: Where is your current residence?

**R10:** Amsterdam Holendrecht

Mike: What is your profession or occupation?

**R10:** I work with Intel Company at Schiphol

Mike: Would you please give a short history about your religious / Christian background?

**R10:** I wasn't raised in a church-going family, much less a Christian family—though it was a good and loving home. But when I became a teenager, I began to ask the big questions of life:

“Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?” In the search for answers I began to attend on my own a large church in our community. But instead of answers, all I found were messages on offerings and tithes. Until A day when an old woman gave me a tract in the bus that read “Christ Loves You” After reading this tract, the old woman looked at me and said, my son, do not wait any longer; just surrender your life to Him now. He has been waiting for you for long! This is how it happened.

## **(ii) Personal Reasons for leaving the church**

Mike: When did you join RCCG-JHA?

**R10:** I have been in the church since 2008

Mike: Could you please tell me your role while in RCCG-JHA?

**R10:** Mike, I wouldn't want to disclose my position while in the church. But I tell you! I was an active member in the church.

Mike: What would you consider to be the Missionary Activities of RCCG-JHA in the Netherlands?

**R10:** The missionary activities of RCCG-JHA is Preparing a people who will take the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to all nations. This is simple but elaborate. It has to do with teaching, preaching, praying and above all, living a life of holiness at all times.

Mike: What are the expectations of RCCG-JHA members?

**R10:** For me, I expected to have been in a place where God answered prayers. Simple!

Mike: Does the church, I mean RCCG-JHA ever live up to those expectations?

**R10:** Yes, I saw those expectations there when I joined the church. It was there! Very there....We were very happy during our early days in the church.

Mike: Could you please tell me why you left the church?

**R10:** Mike, I think you will agree with me that no one is an island! I mean no one is above correction. But in the case of RCCG-JHA, the leaders hate suggestions and corrections. Members' suggestions and opinions no longer count. Of what use when we cannot speak our minds? This is why I left.

Mike: Did you ever leave the church at once or after some time?

**R10:** It was a gradual process. It didn't happen at once.

Mike: Did you ever speak to any church member before your departure?

**R10:** Mike... I tried... I really tried. I spoke severally with the head pastor but still, no change. I also spoke with some of the members but they too have their own reservations about the ways things were going in the church.

Mike: Are you still willing to return to the church if things improved?

R10: (Nod his head) I don't think so.

Mike: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

R10: (Sit back and relaxed on the chair) No Mike, that's all.