

# **THE HISTORY OF THE PENTECOSTAL DENOMINATION IN NIGERIA**

Edited by G.S.Chukwuemeka

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**The History of Pentecostal Denomination in Nigeria**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this book to the Holy Trinity.

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS

1 **G.S.Chukwuemeka** is a lecturer at the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences, Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo, Delta State, Nigeria and Dynamic Theological Seminary, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

2 **Jonathan O. Dimobika** is a lecturer at Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State.

3 **Egbeja Cincin Julius** defended is Doctoral Dissertation in November 2022 at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

4 **Edwin Chinyeremugwu** is a PhD student at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

5 **Akintunde Ojo Sunday** is a PhD student at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

6 **Kingsley Pardung**-is a PhD student at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE METHOD OF SUCCESSION IN SELECTED PENTECOSTAL AND FRONT-LINE DENOMINATIONS IN NIGERIA.**

**by**

**C. P. EDWIN**

#### **Introduction**

Succession is generally a challenge in any organization whether religious or secular. The challenge of succession becomes bigger when the leader is a founder or a long-term serving leader in that organization. Rothwell, states “when experienced people leave organizations, they take with them not only the capacity to do the work but also the accumulated wisdom they have acquired”.<sup>1</sup> Unlike traditional churches that were previously known as main line churches but are no longer mainline in the African context today, because of the increase and impact made by the New Generation denominations. Succession is considered only after the demise of the founder or resignation on the grounds of ill health, moral failure or old age (retirement).

In some New Generation churches, succession is anticipated after a specific period (every five to ten years depending on their constitution. Succession in Pentecostal churches experiences several forms of contentions and conflicts especially at the demise of a long-term serving incumbent pastor, founder or General overseer.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE CONCEPT PENTECOSTAL**

**Pentecostal:** The word "Pentecostal" is a name describing churches and Christian believers who emphasize a post-salvation experience known as "the baptism in the Holy Spirit." This spiritual baptism is evidenced by the reception of "the charismata," or supernatural gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit, especially speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing. Pentecostals affirm that the dramatic spiritual gifts of the original first-century Pentecost, as described in Acts 2, are still poured out on Christians today.

### **Categories of Pentecostal;**

**1. Classical Pentecostal:** First Pentecostal churches that were influenced by the Azusa revival movement of the USA (Apostolic Faith Mission; Assemblies of God; Full Gospel Church of God, etc.). These churches have

denominational headquarters where they are governed either at a local or national level.

**2. Independent Pentecostal Churches:** These are churches that are self-governing, sovereign or independent. They are usually led by pioneering founders or long serving pastors. These include among others Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Deeper Life Bible Church, Living Faith aka Winners Chapel, Church of God Mission, Dunamis International Gospel Centre and The Redeemed Evangelical Mission. (TREM)

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.**

**Denomination.** A **religious denomination** is a subgroup within a religion that has a common name, tradition and identity. The term is often used for several Christian denominations including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church,, and the many sorts of Protestantism like Baptist, Episcopalian and Pentecostals. The following under-listed are basic issues of discussion in the subject matter:

**Leadership Succession.** The primary job of leaders is to reproduce themselves and not to replace themselves. When leaders focus on replacement, they will misappropriate their responsibilities and settle for warm



bodies instead of weekly volunteers.<sup>3</sup> Leadership succession “is a systematic process where leaders identify, assess and develop their staff to ensure they can assume key roles within the organization.”<sup>4</sup> Leadership succession is a planned transition. It does not happen arbitrarily or suddenly. It is imperative that church leadership succession is ensuring that the doctrine that the future leaders will be teaching remains true to that of the apostolic teachings.

According to Akwu, “Real leaders recognize that they are simply one link in a chain of God's eternal plan. When the church fails to focus on raising leaders to replace the current ones, then she has broken the chain and the church will die.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, leadership succession is an issue in Nigeria in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. People can go to any length to have their way into church leadership.

### **Replacement Planning versus Succession Planning**

Replacement planning is based on the premise that an organization chart will remain the same over time. It usually identifies “backups” for all top positions in an establishment. Succession planning, conversely, is oriented around developing people instead of merely identifying them as replacements.<sup>6</sup> Berke stated that replacement planning is an effort focused on identifying

successors for key positions, especially two or three key levels within the organization.<sup>7</sup> According to him, replacement planning is the easiest replacement process. Succession planning focuses on leadership reproduction over leadership replacement. Succession planning is the development of a sequential, detailed process whereby organizations can conduct the orderly replacement of one serving in a given position.”<sup>8</sup>

It is also “a continuous, systematic effort to ensure continuity of leadership, protection, intellectual capital development and knowledge for the future of the organization and to promote individual development.”<sup>9</sup>

Succession planning also provides continuity of leadership by cultivating leadership within church leadership channel. Rothwell maintains that succession planning mean that any effort is made to ensure that the performance of the organization, division or department remains effective through the implementation of development, succession and strategic planning of key positions over time.<sup>10</sup>

A succession plan is therefore a road map that is created in order to navigate the process of succession from beginning to end. It is a deliberate systematic effort that

ensures continuity in an organization by identifying future leaders and making them ready for leadership roles in an organization. Without a succession plan it will be very difficult for the process of transition to take place. It is a high risk for any church or organization not to have a leadership succession plan. Succession planning is “the second most important need in every church”. However, very few churches are involved in planning for a transition before the inevitable departure of the incumbent leader happens.

### **Biblical Examples of Succession.**

The Bible is the manual for every life's endeavour. Succession can be traced in the Holy Scriptures. Its concerns are evident in the Genesis account of human origins. These concerns become heightened in the narratives of the patriarchs, as in Abraham's lament about not having an heir (Gen.15:3). Subsequently, owing to the fulfillment of the divine promise of progeny, we see the succession of one patriarch after another till the birth of the nation in the 12 tribes of Israel. Similarly, the same concerns surfaced early in the life of Israel during the wilderness wandering period, when Moses, their leader, in view of his approaching death, became concerned that at his demise, that Israel would not be as sheep without a

shepherd, and in response to that concern, Yahweh elected Joshua as Moses' successor (Num. 27:12–23). The death of Joshua created a leadership vacuum that was the bane of Israel throughout the period of the judges until the rise of the monarchy. Even during the monarchy, leadership was never without challenges. The dynastic struggle between the house of Saul and the house of David as well as the internecine feuds within the house of David were aspects of the challenges and problems of leadership succession.

The New Testament is not without its own challenges and options for leadership succession. While the gospels do not directly address matters of succession, they do not neglect them. The contest between the twelve apostles for supremacy, as Jesus began to talk about his departure from the earth, is telling. As MacDonald observes:

One of the most perplexing concepts for Jesus' disciples to grasp was that of the nature of this unique kingdom whose source, means and end was God. Yet the great truths about God's reign had been presented to them early and repeatedly in their adventure

with Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

Yet right up close to his passion, the sons of Zebedee in concert with their mother (an aunt of Jesus), for instance, were jostling for the place of rank (successors-in-waiting, so to say), as the Master's closest relatives (first cousins) among his band of disciples.

Even after the resurrection, the thinking of the apostles was still warped and wrapped up in this worldly kingdom concepts. It is not surprising that two millennia after Pentecost that some people are still building personal kingdoms instead of the kingdom of God. The crux of this research is that ministers of the gospel who are focused on honouring God and labouring to advance his kingdom, upon their departure from the earth, naturally bequeath any structures arising from their efforts to those who share a common vision with them. Conversely, those fixated on building personal kingdoms seek, by any means, to ensure that their family members 'receive' the call to the ministry and take over the empires they have built over the years, instead of allowing for a natural succession from within the ranks of those of them that have ministered alongside the founding leaders.

Insight concerning the process that Jesus used in His

leadership development and succession plan is outlined in Mark 3:14-15.

These three steps outlined below were suggested by Hybels in his practical strategy for developing leaders:

**(1) He Appointed:** Christ chose those who would be his key leaders. It was not by accident. The Apostle Paul understood this as he said “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

**(2) That they should be with him:** In Jesus' three years with his disciples, he provided them an immersion experience in leadership development. Everything he did, in word or deeds had a teaching or training aspect to it.

**(3) That he might send them out:** This is the eventual goal of leadership - to send them out to delegate them for the purpose of the ministry, accomplishing the work of the ministry. Jesus first sent out the twelve (Luke 9:1-2) and later the seventy (Luke 10:1) to gain experiential lessons that could be learned in no other way. The final answer of Hybels' respondents for the reason they were leaders as quoted by Anthony was, “Someone trusted me with responsibility.”<sup>20</sup> By this delegation the leader puts a stamp of approval on the emerging leader and shows

confidence in the preparation.

The emergence of Timothy as a protégé under Paul is a good example of mentoring and succession in the Bible. Leadership succession between Paul and Timothy is very obvious in his pastoral letter to Timothy, “And the things which you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). Holloway asserted that, “Paul recognized the importance of equipping a successor to carry on the gospel message after his life and ministry were over.”<sup>21</sup> Leaders have passed the baton to their successors throughout history. These succession stories include a combination of success, failure, principles, and parameters.<sup>22</sup> Jesus Christ, Saviour and initiator of the New Testament church initiated the concept of succession. As a follower of Christ, succession should be second nature or a rite of passage, because it encapsulates the ministry and life of Jesus. Consistent with the fact that the church is his body and are interconnected within that body (Romans 12:4-5), the contemporary church should be integrating the protocol, principles, and patterns of Jesus for succession practices.

**Observations on leadership structure and succession patterns in the New Testament Church reveal the following:**

1. Jesus had established a collegial leadership, in the apostles, for the eschatological community of the Spirit he was setting up, with Simon Peter as the spokesperson of this group.
2. Jesus did not hand over the leadership of his newly established eschatological community to his cousins, James and John, who were his closest relatives in his band of disciples.
3. The collegial pattern of leadership and the emergence of leaders on the basis of gifting continued in the era of the church, captured in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, even with the rise of the diaconate and the presbytery.
4. The apostolic churches had the direct superintendence of the apostles as Christ's representatives. In the absence of the apostles, apostolic delegates were appointed to represent them on the basis of the soundness of their faith, doctrine and lives, through the mentorship of the apostles, not on kin relationship.
5. In the sub-apostolic era, with the (imminent) martyrdom of the apostles, the elders and deacons were appointed to lead the churches based on their faith, character, adherence to sound doctrines and the traditions



handed down by the apostles (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Tit. 1:5–9) not familial affiliation.

6. Even in the post-apostolic church, the writings of the church fathers indicate that adherence to apostolic faith, life and traditions were determinative for the appointment of church leaders (bishops) to succeed the apostles (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.1–4).

7. The non-apostolic writers of the Gospels (Mark and Luke) did not attain that status because of familial affinities but ministerial tutelage (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1)

### **Reasons for Succession in the church.**

Succession is imperative in the growth and development of any organization. While organizations work and plan for their expansion, so is the need for an effective and defined succession plan. Hence, the reasons for succession in the church.

According to Vanderbloemen and Bird, there are two types of successions in every church denomination not just the Pentecostal: expected and unexpected ones.

Expected successions happen when there is transition in ministry vocation. This is where a pastor changes roles from pastoring a church to a different ministry vocation

whether church planting, lecturing at a theological institution or chaplaincy etc. Other expected transitions may be pastoral rotations after a specific period, whether by a bishop's appointment or a call to a different congregation, depending on the specific polity of the congregation. Retirement is another form of expected succession. Expected succession happens when parties involved have been made aware or are expecting a possible transition and therefore in a better position to put systems in place to prepare for succession.

### **Reasons for Expected Successions.**

**i. Retirement.** Retirement and succession are sometimes used interchangeably however these are two different processes. Not all successions are caused by retirements. When Pope Benedict XIV retired in 2013 at the age of 85 it was unprecedented but retirement is inevitable because human beings have physical and mental limitations. Various denominations have stipulated retirement ages for their ministers in some cases it is 65 or 70 years

### **ii. Pastoral term of office expiration**

There are denominations where there is a set pastoral rotation system where a pastor spends five years then he or she is moved to the next congregation. In most cases, the pastor and the leadership are aware of the rotation

period and should be able to have a plan in advance, of searching for a replacement. In most cases, pastors communicate with their congregations to prepare them for such transitions. That does not mean that the transition is easy but at least it is expected. There are ministers who find it hard to retire because they view calling to ministry as a lifelong call. They perceive retirement as abandoning their call and therefore turning their back on God. Others see their work as an integral part of their identity. They do not know how else to define themselves outside their work. Their work defines their existence. Some see their work or call as a prestige with certain societal status and benefits and therefore find it difficult to retire because of the loss of benefits. Other leaders are not sure whether the successor will have the capacity to grow the work or may just fail to make it work. They worry about whether the investment they made over the years will be sustained. Some leaders do not know what else they will do with their lives if they retire. They feel they will be bored and depressed because they cannot imagine their lives outside the active ministry. Other leaders may want to retire but are concerned about their economic situation once they retire. They fear that the perks that they have enjoyed as pastor will be lost and they may not be able to maintain their standard of living. This is an unfortunate state of

affairs which reflects a lack of proper financial planning for the future. There are several ways by which a retired pastor can still be productive: They can conduct teachings and give mentorship services or counselling in areas of their expertise; They can serve as consultant, coach or mentors for the church in general on issues of organizational growth and development including leadership training, administration, and conflict resolution. The key process is to shift focus from what one used to do well, to what one has been designed to be and what contribution one can make to others.

## **METHODS OF SUCCESSIONS IN SELECTED FRONTLINES AND PENTECOSTAL DENOMINATIONS**

Leadership succession is a major problem in the church. There is a popular statement; “Power intoxicates.” In addition to the aforementioned, “Succession issues and leadership transition is always a challenge. Many Church organizations get into conflicts, split or even die at this time of transitioning in leadership. Big and small organizations have progressed or regressed at this point of change. The difference has been brought up by how succession was handled in each case.

Aboki, observed that there have been several indigenous churches in Nigeria that were entangled in leadership succession battles after the death of their founders.<sup>23</sup>

This sub-section seeks to examine leadership succession in the following churches:

1. Redeemed Christian Church of God,
2. Church of God Mission.
3. Assemblies of God Church Nigeria.
4. Four Square Gospel Church in Nigeria.
5. Christ Apostolic Church.

### **1. The Redeemed Christian Church of God.**

One finds the succession story of the Redeemed Christian Church of God from its founder to the present General Overseer very fascinating. The founder of the church, Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi, a child of classical Pentecostalism, had learned the importance of team leadership inherent in classical Pentecostalism. Thus, right from the beginning, he took his team members into confidence, and any time he went on his frequent evangelistic campaigns, he left his headquarters church in the care of resident pastors. He even chose a person more educated than himself (Pastor Olonade) to set up and run the bureaucracy of the church.<sup>24</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that, at his death, Pa Akindayomi did not

bequeath his church to a relative; rather, he bequeathed it to a person whom he foresaw would bring to fruition what the Lord had revealed to him concerning what has come to be called the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

## **2. Church of God Mission.**

After the sudden demise of the founder of the church, the late Archbishop Benson Idahosa in March 1998, the Nigerian Apostle of Faith, his wife Margaret took over the reins of power at the Church of God Mission International and is still its presiding bishop and president. Currently, his son, Bishop Faith Emmanuel Benson Idahosa, is the president of the Benson Idahosa University, the president of Big Ben's Children Hospital and the vice president of All Nations for Christ Bible Institute International, among many other positions within the ministries of Church of God Mission International.

## **3. Assemblies of God Church.**

The crisis rocked the Assemblies of God Church in Nigeria on Friday, February 24, 2017, brought to an end by the Supreme Court in favour of the then General Superintendent of the church, Rev. Chidi Okoroafor in a unanimous judgment, the apex court held that the appeal

filed by the suspended General Superintendent of the church, Rev Prof. Paul Emeka was not meritorious and was accordingly dismissed. Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun who delivered the lead judgment affirmed the decision of the Court of Appeal in Enugu which upheld the suspension and dismissal of the appellant by the church.<sup>25</sup> The church was enmeshed in a leadership crisis for more than two years, culminating in the emergence of two factional leaders and multiple court actions.

The crisis all started immediately after the General Council of the church had on March 6, 2014, suspended Rev. Prof. Paul Emeka for violating several sections of the Constitution and Bye-Laws of the church, especially Article 12, which deals with taking or using any other person to drag the church to court for any reason. The decision to suspend Rev. Prof. Emeka was taken at the meeting of the General Committee held on Thursday, March 6, 2014, in the Conference Hall of the National Secretariat, Enugu, after the committee had deliberated on the implications of his action on the image of the church worldwide.<sup>26</sup>

Pastor Ejikeme Ejim, who succeeded Rev Chidi Okoroafor retires in December 2022 and on Thursday, at the Evangel University, Okpoto campus, in the Ishielu

Local Government Area of Ebonyi State during the 37th general council meeting of the church, the church elected new General Overseer, Rev. Dr. Abel Amadi, the Owerri District Superintendent of the Church.<sup>27</sup> He defeated General Secretary of the church, Pastor Akpan Amaowoh in a keenly contested election. Suffice it therefore to say that succession in the Assemblies of God Church in Nigeria is by election.

#### **4. Christ Apostolic Church.**

Similarly, the conflict happened after the death of Joseph Ayo Babalola, the first General Evangelist of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). In 2010, there was a lawsuit in the Federal High Court, Lagos on who was to succeed Pastor E. H. Olusheye as the head of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) worldwide. One faction was led by Pastor Olusheye while another faction was led by Pastor Akintola.<sup>28</sup> In another development, as Christians worldwide were celebrating Christmas and giving glory to God as they marked the end of 2012, worshippers, at the Christ Apostolic Church in a branch in Lagos were busy engaging in a battle of supremacy and allegiance. The crisis in the church which had been lingering for more than 20 years as of then, took a dangerous turn when two factions of the church clashed during a Sunday morning service. It was gathered that the Lagos-based



faction which was busy with church activities was suddenly brought to an end when the Ibadan-based faction arrived and chased them away.<sup>29</sup> It was reported that the aggrieved faction disconnected the electricity supply to the church after they were chased out only for the Ibadan faction to conduct their service in darkness. According to Awojobi most of the tussles in our churches today are personal in nature. They always arise from a struggle for power, which resulted from a basic dislike of one person for another member opposing the leadership when they are not the kind of persons they like or they are not acting according to their own expectations.<sup>30</sup>

Concluding this segment is a brief about the leadership succession method in one of the orthodox churches, the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion.

The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) was “constituted into a separate Province of the Worldwide Anglican Communion with Archbishop Timothy Olufosoye as the first Archbishop on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1979. Below is the leadership succession from 1979 to date

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years</b>
1) Archbishop Timothy O. Olufosoye	1979–1986
2) Archbishop Joseph Abiodun Adetiloye	1986–1999

- 3) Archbishop Peter Akinola 2000–2010
- 4) Archbishop Nicholas Okoh 2010–2020
5. Archbishop Henry Ndukauba 2020 to date

The office of the Primate, Church of Nigeria has a ten-year tenure. A new Primate should be elected six months before the expiration of the tenure of the incumbent. The present Primate, Most Rev. Henry Ndukauba assumed office on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2020 as the tenure of Primate Nicholas Okoh elapsed on the same date, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The election of a new primate Ndukauba took place in September 2019 at St Peter's Cathedral in Asaba, Delta State by the House of Bishops. Before his election, Primate Ndukauba was then the Bishop of Gombe Diocese as well as the Archbishop of the Ecclesiastical Province of Jos Province. By that election and presentation, he became the fifth Archbishop, Metropolitan and Primate, of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). The election of Primate Henry Ndukauba created a vacancy in Gombe Diocese as well as Jos Province. In January 2020, during the annual retreat of Bishops of the Church of Nigeria at Ibru International Ecumenical Centre in Delta State, the House of Bishops elected Rev. Canon Cletus Kpangbari as the new Bishop of Gombe Diocese; while Rt. Rev. Ibrahim Markus, Bishop of Yola was elected as the new

Archbishop of Jos Diocese. Accordingly, succession in Anglican Communion is a by-election which is done by the House of Bishops of the church. The person to be elected as bishop in Anglican Communion must be forty-five years old and above within the time of the election and must have been a Priest for fifteen years. These are among other spiritual, theological and moral requirements.

### **Obstacles to Succession Methods in Christian Communities in Nigeria.**

There are many obstacles to accomplishing effective succession planning programmes in Pentecostal denomination: lack of support, money or benefits, interest or sentiment, ethnicity or tribal bigotry which leads to “disunity, frustration, back-biting, unhealthy relationship, character assassination and destructive criticism. All these often result in litigation, death, cliques and splitting of the church, short or protracted violence, conflict, Shame and disgrace. Also, there is politics, pride, a quick-fix mentality, poor visibility (poor attitude towards the future), dramatic change, excessive paperwork, and too many meetings can hamper the church's efforts. Other barriers to succession planning include “inadequate funding, weak development plans, and difficulty in tracking performance.” Without a doubt,

the reasons stated above are true. The reality is that most denominations do not have a defined and structured method and programme. In addition to the points mentioned above, there is the practice of false assumption of success whereby an individual's achievement or success at one level guarantees success at a higher level. According to Aboki, John, this point is supported by William Rothwell who said, "The competence required for success at each level is different."<sup>31</sup> Dynamism of time, the need of the church and the Vision/Mission of the church must be considered by each denomination as they prepare for leadership change of baton.

## **Recommendation**

Juxtaposing the leadership succession of contemporary Pentecostals vis-à-vis apostolic and patristic praxis leaves much to be desired. The core determining factor is perspective on ministry: Kingdom of God versus personal kingdom. Some Pentecostals have increasingly been decoyed by the lure of the world's material prosperity. In the massive primitive accumulation of wealth concomitant with the wealth and wellness gospel, leadership becomes less accountable and transparent with its membership, and the need to surround itself with

trusted confident rises correspondingly, hence the heavy reliance on family members. Andy Hargreaves' thoughts on leadership succession in education are pertinent here. He writes, 'But without strong systems, increased transparency, and greater emotional honesty and support, many of us handle succession moments badly – in relation to others and also in terms of ourselves. Unfortunately, this is the story of the Pentecostal movement at the moment. The collegial leadership style of the New Testament Apostolic Church, espoused in classical Pentecostalism, has been replaced in the neo-Pentecostal movements by sole proprietary managerial leadership patterns. Lack of financial transparency results in cronyism or nepotism and familial succession practices. It is the uncertainty that these family-centred practices create for faithful disciples of Pentecostal leaders that, in large part, account for the breakaways and formation of new ministries to ensure personal financial survival. To counter this trend and encourage the return to true biblical apostolic ministry, the following proposals or recommendations have been drawn from the study of the New Testament church structure and succession patterns:

1. Team leadership is the biblical pattern of leadership ( has been demonstrated in our survey of the New

Testament church leadership pattern), usually with an individual as the point-person of the team, and should be espoused by all Christian ministries.

2. Following the example of Jesus, family affiliation should not be the criterion for advancing in the leadership hierarchy, leading to succession in a Christian ministry setting.

3. Rise in rank in the leadership hierarchy in ministry should be based on people's gifting and ministry calling.

4. Closely related to the above, people should be called to serve in positions of responsibility on account of their testimonies of unquestioned faith, with abiding love for God and the brotherhood in Christ, impeccable Christian character, soundness in doctrine and faithfulness to established traditions (1 Tm. 3:1–13; Tit. 1:5–9).

5. There should be deliberate and conscientious efforts towards raising and mentoring succeeding generations of leaders as the case was in the apostolic church, rather than waiting to pass on the ministry legacy to family members, like a hereditary monarchy.

## **Conclusion**

As it is often said that success without a successor amounts to failure,' in every organization, the church inclusive, understanding the standard process of succession plans occupies the thoughts and duties of every godly leadership. The Church has its roots in Jesus

Christ, the One and only foundation on which the early Apostles passed on the Christian church's biblical faith. Apostolic succession, therefore, is taken as a generational Bible-based standard and practice. The Apostolic succession is the method whereby the ministry of the Christian Church is derived from the Apostles by a continuous succession, which has usually been associated with claims that the succession is through a series of Bishops, originating from the earliest Apostles originally appointed by Jesus Christ Himself.

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