



**Artificial Intelligence and The Nexus Between New Church Members and Church Membership Retention in Lagos East Baptist Conference, Lagos, Nigeria.**

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**Abstract**

This study focuses on the lack of connections between new church members, who keep joining the Baptist churches but not being retained and the use of artificial intelligence for proper membership retention, assimilation and deployments for ministries. This work, employs a multifaceted approach, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the connections between church members and the new members who keep joining Baptist churches as they affect the rate of retention of members of Lagos East Baptist Conference. Findings in the study show that there are both prospects and challenges that contribute to the nexus between new church members and membership retention. However, while the benefits can be maximized the challenges can as well be surmounted in order to maintain a high rate of membership retention for effective church membership retention through the use of artificial intelligence by checking doctrinal alignment with new Baptist members who share common beliefs and values with the church in a new members' class. The impacts of inclusivity and acceptance of diverse backgrounds, opinions, and experiences of new members. This study concluded on the note that learning essential membership responsibilities in church membership retention that support attracting and retaining church members cannot be overemphasized. The study, therefore, recommended that Church members be purposeful in creating a welcoming atmosphere, upgrade by using modern technology that enhances and actively engage in worship services, demonstrating genuine care and concern for fellow members during times of joy, sorrow, or need.



Actively inviting friends, family, and acquaintances to church events and services. Being available, dependable, committed and teachable members.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Baptist Conference, Church membership, Lagos East, Nexus, Retention

### **Introduction**

Non retention of new church members and the mass exodus of younger and more youthful members of the Baptist denomination of Lagos East Baptist Conference in recent times is the motivation for this study. This challenge if unchecked poses a great threat to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all attendees. The consequence effects on the growth of the churches in terms of showcasing effective worship and missions' activities shall be enormous. This study aims at examining the nexus between new church members and church membership retention in Lagos East Baptist Conference, Lagos, Nigeria and the use of artificial intelligence for effective retention. The purpose of this study is to determine the connections between church members and the new members who keep joining the Baptist churches regularly but not being retained with the help of artificial intelligence. Member retention is a system of assimilation and keeping of new members in the faith (Warren, 1995, p. 78). An article in the *Adventist Review* (June 2007:6) by Lowell Cooper and Mark Finley, describes member retention as "closing the back door," or reducing loss of membership in a church (Finley, 2018, p. 56). The nexus between church members and church membership retention refers to the connection or relationship between the attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics of individuals within a religious community and their likelihood to remain actively involved in and committed to that church. Understanding this connection is crucial for religious leaders and communities seeking to enhance retention rates and foster a sense of belonging among their members. There is no doubt that Church members, like the pastoral leadership play a crucial role in promoting church membership retention. In today's digital world, several apps have emerged each with a promise to help people grow spiritually focusing on harnessing technology for Christian spiritual growth and retention. The attitudes, actions, dispositions and involvement of church members contribute significantly to the overall atmosphere and sense of community within the church. There are several ways in which church members can actively contribute to fostering a positive environment that encourages retention (Sithole, 2010, p. 43).



### **Strategies for Church Membership Retention**

Artificial intelligence in terms of setting up automated communications in the church environments makes members feel connected with the Church and this shows that their ongoing value of their membership requires continued communication. With the help of artificial intelligence, automate targeted communications (ATC) can be leveraged upon to send different messages to church members at different stages in their membership journeys thereby offering a superior membership experience. This drastically reduces the stress staff go through with manual texting, emails and letter writings. Christine Bergeron, May 26, 2023 posited that as members join, organizations including the church should consider automating onboarding email communications to ensure new members feel welcome at their association and understand the value of their membership benefits (Bergeron, 2023). Choosing to automate onboarding emails is a great way to enhance members' orientation process and guarantee new members feel like they are part of the church family. With automation, the church can build personalized member journeys so church members receive relevant messages based on the action the church takes (or don't take) in each email. An automated personalized renewal email series can be set up to remind members of benefits they can have leveraged on, the benefits they have not yet utilized, and any exciting upcoming events or opportunities they will miss if they do not take certain actions. Where this is in place, membership retention could be high.

Enhancing personalized church membership experiences tailored to each person's unique preferences and needs through advanced technology creates great high retention rate. This happens by studying and knowing different church member data, like, what stewardship, services or ministry they prefer, how they attend church both online and onsite, and what they like on social media. Through detailed data analysis, Baptist churches of the Lagos East Baptist Conference able to use predictive analytics to identify church members who are likely to have issues or leave and address them before they do. Also, automation streamlines church programmes, ensuring swift, effective support that enhances overall fulfilment of the members. For example, in e-commerce, recommendation engines, personalized marketing algorithms, and customer behaviour analytics are used to track a customer's buying pattern, search history, and other details. This analytical approach suggests products that are relevant to the customer (Sogody, 2024). In the same way, a church could develop a recommendation engine, personalized gospel propagating algorithms, and church member behavior analytics to



track a church member's attendance pattern to services and other details. This also automatically help to enhance the relationship between the member and the Church. This is because when church members see personalized recommendations that match their interests, they are more likely to return, boosting church membership retention for the church.

Apart from artificial intelligence helping to strengthen church membership retention, welcoming atmosphere is critical and important - Church members can create a welcoming atmosphere by greeting newcomers, making them feel included, and helping them navigate the church community. A friendly and open environment is more likely to retain new members. However, where the opposite of a welcoming environment is seen, it affects membership retention. Close to this is involvement in Fellowship - Actively participating in fellowship activities, small groups, and community events helps build relationships within the church. Strong social connections enhance a sense of belonging, making members more likely to stay engaged. This writer's engagement with societies in some Baptist churches of Lagos East Baptist Conference attests to this fact. Actively participating in fellowship activities, small groups, and community events helps build relationships within the church. Service and Volunteerism - Contributing time and skills through volunteer work not only supports the church's activities but also helps members feel a sense of purpose and investment in the community. Active involvement in service can strengthen the commitment to the church (Greenleaf, 2017, p. 56). Close to this supporting church leadership - Respecting and supporting church leaders fosters a positive and unified community. Members who trust and follow the leadership are more likely to remain committed to the church's mission and vision. Prayer and Spiritual Growth - Encouraging and participating in prayer groups, Bible studies, and other spiritual growth activities contributes to the overall spiritual health of the church. Members focused on their spiritual development are more likely to stay connected.

Mentoring and Discipleship - Establishing mentoring relationships or engaging in discipleship activities helps newer members integrate into the church community. Discipling is a Christian training that matures Christians into effective personal growth and development in faith but not synonymous with equipping. While equipping is concerned with furnishing one with the necessities for an undertaking for effective performance of the task at hand, discipleship is more to do with attachment of a novice to a master in the trade for purposes of being instructed, trained, and mentored by the master. According to Burrill, discipling involves "attachment to someone in discipleship ... living in a



relationship with the One who is discipling you (Burrill, 2006, p. 29). In this relationship, one is to be constantly learning more about that person". Discipling, therefore, is a process, not an event. It is exposure to the life and teachings of the Master and mentorship by Him (Akanni, 2013:43). Having experienced members' guide and support newcomers can enhance their sense of belonging. Active Participation in Worship - Actively engaging in worship services, including singing, praying, and participating in rituals, can create a sense of unity among church members. Shared worship experiences strengthen the communal bond.

Conflict Resolution - Handling conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner contributes to a healthy church environment (Rainer, 2024). Members who actively work towards resolving conflicts help maintain a positive atmosphere and reduce the likelihood of others leaving due to disputes. Caring for One Another - Demonstrating genuine care and concern for fellow members during times of joy, sorrow, or need builds a supportive community. Acts of kindness and empathy strengthen the emotional ties between members. Inviting and Engaging New Members - Actively inviting friends, family, and acquaintances to church events and services helps grow the community. Members who actively participate in outreach contribute to the church's vitality and long-term sustainability (Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, 2023:11). Church members, collectively, contribute to the overall culture and environment of the church. By embodying these roles, they can significantly impact the retention of current members and attract new individuals to become part of the community. The combined efforts of church members and leadership create a vibrant and welcoming church experience, enhancing the likelihood of membership retention (Babarinde K. , 2009, p. 16). While churches strive to create welcoming and inclusive environments, certain attitudes among existing church members may unintentionally discourage or drive away new members. It's essential to address these attitudes to ensure a positive and supportive atmosphere (Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, 2023:9).

Here are some attitudes that may have a negative impact on new members: Cliques and Exclusivity - Exclusive social circles within the church can be off-putting to newcomers. If existing members form tight-knit groups that are difficult for newcomers to join, it may create a sense of exclusion (Adeniji A.A, Osibanjo A.O , 2012, p. 79). Judgmental Behavior - A judgmental attitude towards newcomers, especially regarding their lifestyle, background, or choices, can alienate them. Acceptance and understanding are crucial in fostering a sense of belonging. Unwelcoming Body Language - Non-



verbal cues such as avoiding eye contact, not offering greetings, or appearing disinterested can make newcomers feel unwelcome (Babarinde, 2009). Positive body language is essential in creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. Resistance to Change - If existing members resist or criticize changes or new ideas within the church, it can create a negative environment. New members may feel discouraged if their contributions are not valued. Lack of Genuine Interest - Failing to show genuine interest in getting to know newcomers can make them feel ignored or unimportant (Rainer, 2024). Welcoming gestures, such as asking about their background and interests, can go a long way.

Others are, overemphasis on rules and traditions - If there is an overemphasis on strict adherence to rules or traditions without room for flexibility, it may create a rigid environment that alienates those who do not immediately conform (Akinsola, 2014). Neglecting to Include New Members - Existing members who do not actively involve new members in church activities or events may inadvertently signal a lack of inclusivity. Encouraging participation and integration is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging. Ineffective Communication - Poor communication skills or a lack of effort to communicate with newcomers can hinder their understanding of the church's culture and activities. Clear and transparent communication is essential for fostering a positive experience. Furthermore, unwelcoming Language - The use of exclusive or insider language that new members may not understand can create a sense of alienation (Babarinde K. , 2015). Communication should be inclusive and accessible to everyone. Failure to Acknowledge Newcomers - If new members are not acknowledged or welcomed during services or events, they may feel invisible and unappreciated. Taking the time to greet and acknowledge newcomers demonstrates a caring and inclusive community. Addressing these attitudes requires proactive efforts from both church leadership and existing members. Creating awareness, providing training on inclusivity, and fostering a culture of acceptance can help eliminate negative attitudes and ensure that new members feel welcome, valued, and embraced by the church community.

However, this researcher's interest is on the dispositions of the church members on church membership retention in Lagos East Baptist Conference. Quality church membership in any church is key to the growth and development of a church. Just as insufficient money in circulation leads to hardship, so does a decline in church membership, whose members constantly move to another denomination or ministry (Tijani T. , 2023). Where church membership dwindles, both the pastorate and membership experience stress in



achieving success in Ministry (Tijani T. , 2023). In the olden days, Christians were given multiple assignments to preach, teach and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world's end (Jeremiah, January 3, 2016). That is the "The Great Commission" (Carver, 2015; Matthew 28:19-20, Life Application Study Bible, 2009). Jesus Christ instructs His disciples before His ascension back to heaven: "Therefore, go, make disciple of all nations .... Teach the new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you, and know that ..." (Matthew 28:19-20; N.I.V. Bible, 2005) (Tijani T. , 2023). In fulfilment of the Commission, the Church is given a mission to tell people about the culmination of salvation and teach God's word to both the believers (saved) and the unbelievers (unsaved). Making disciples is not easy. It involves funds and human resources. Despite the difficulty in making disciples, Baptists in Lagos East Baptist Conference have continued to plant churches, gaining members to these churches, conducting the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper from time to time to gain more members into the churches.

However, this researcher has noted that several people join the Baptist church weekly, but the churches are never complete. It is also said that those who enter the Baptist churches do it briefly before they locate another denomination if not abandon faith in Lagos Baptist Conference. The loss of members makes it challenging to disciple or teach them as commanded by Jesus (Burks, 2024, p. 67). Wherever these "untrained" and "undisciplined" individuals turned to, most times, they turned out to be thorns in the flesh of ministers and churches they eventually joined. These, among other reasons, have always been a concern to this researcher and motivation for this work (Tijani T. , 2023). Justification for Church Membership Retention through Church Members and Artificial Intelligence

Several reasons justify church membership retention: it improves the Church's ability to know and lead more people to Christ that will end in eternal life. It helps new and old members stay in the Church, become deeply committed disciples, and remain long enough to teach Christ's commandment. Jesus's ascension into the heavens, and the establishment of the Christian Church over two thousand years ago have made the Christian Church have a receptive influence on society worldwide (McBride & Giem, 2006:67). Many scholars have studied relationships and interactions among family, marriage, religion, community, and man's social problems and concluded that Christianity plays a role in society (D'Souza, 2007; Fagan, 1996:89; McBride & Giem, 2006:89). It, therefore, shows the need for membership growth and nurturing. From a universal perspective, the impact of the Christian Church on society is seen through its



involvement in world relief, aid, humanitarianism, and economic development. Christian organizations, such as World Vision, Maranatha, and Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), have provided worldwide relief and aid in the two forms of medical services, HIV/AIDS counseling and medical care, community development, water purification, orphanage services, economic assistance, shelter, food, educational opportunities, first responders during disasters and catastrophic crisis to suffering people around the world countless times (Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), 2005; Evans E., 1979; McBride B., & Giem, L. G., 2006; World Vision, 2006).

Stability and Continuity - Retaining members provides a stable foundation for the church, ensuring a consistent community that can work together towards shared goals and objectives. In terms of Spiritual Growth, long-term members often experience deeper spiritual growth as they continue to engage in the church's teachings and community life over an extended period. Community bonding is another justification for church membership retention. Retention fosters strong community bonds, allowing members to form lasting relationships and support systems within the church (Dada, 2017). Increased Financial Support -Consistent membership contributes to a more stable financial base for the church through regular giving, which aids in planning and executing various programs and initiatives. This leads to ministry effectiveness. A stable membership enhances the effectiveness of church ministries and outreach programs, as there is a dedicated and engaged community to participate in and support these activities. Sense of Belonging: Members who stay connected over time often develop a deep sense of belonging and attachment to the church, contributing to a positive and nurturing environment. Also, consistent leadership is made possible with church membership retention. Long-term members may contribute to the stability and effectiveness of church leadership, providing a wealth of experience and institutional knowledge. Thereby, making positive church reputation possible. A church with high membership retention may develop a positive reputation, attracting new members who are drawn to the sense of community and stability (Emerson, Michael O., and Rodney M. Woo. , 2008).

### **Factors Contributing to the Nexus between Church Members and Membership Retention**

The nexus between church members and church membership retention refers to the connection or relationship between the attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics of individuals within a



religious community and their likelihood to remain actively involved in and committed to that church. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for religious leaders and communities seeking to enhance retention rates and foster a sense of belonging among their members. Here are several key factors that may contribute to the nexus between church members' dispositions and membership retention are as follows:

Spiritual Engagement - Members who actively participate in church activities, such as worship services, prayer groups, and community outreach, often feel a stronger sense of spiritual connection and purpose. This engagement can positively impact retention (Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, 2001). Sense of Community - The sense of belonging and community within a church plays a vital role in membership retention. Individuals who feel connected to their fellow church members are more likely to stay committed to the community (Babarinde K. , 2009). Leadership and Communication - Effective leadership that communicates clearly and fosters a supportive environment can contribute to positive dispositions among church members. Feeling heard and understood by church leaders can enhance members' commitment (Adetunji, 2010). Doctrinal Alignment - Members who share common beliefs and values with the church are more likely to stay engaged. A strong alignment between individual beliefs and the church's teachings can foster a sense of purpose and identity.

Inclusivity and Acceptance - Churches that promote inclusivity and acceptance of diverse backgrounds, opinions, and experiences tend to create a more welcoming environment ("Visitor Assimilation: It's Not Rocket Science ., 2024). Members who feel accepted are more likely to stay connected to the church. Personal Growth and Development - Churches that provide opportunities for personal and spiritual growth can contribute to positive dispositions. Members who perceive personal development within the church context may be more inclined to stay committed. Crisis Support - Churches that offer support during personal crises or difficult times can strengthen the bond between members and the church. Emotional support and a sense of community during challenging periods can positively influence retention. Effective Pastoral Care - Pastoral care that is attentive, empathetic, and responsive to the needs of individual members can significantly impact their disposition and commitment to the church (Abimbola, 2011). Understanding the interplay between these factors can help religious leaders implement strategies to enhance the overall church experience, promote positive dispositions among members, and ultimately contribute to higher rates of church membership retention. Regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and



community-building initiatives can further strengthen the nexus between church members' dispositions and retention.

However, there are also negative factors contributing to the nexus between church members' dispositions and membership retention to include the following: Resistance to Change: Long-term members may resist change, hindering the church's ability to adapt to evolving societal needs and preferences. Stagnation in Ideas: A consistent membership may lead to a lack of fresh perspectives and ideas, potentially limiting the church's ability to innovate and grow. Exclusivity and Cliques: Long-standing members may form exclusive groups, creating cliques that make it challenging for new members to integrate and feel welcome (Burks, 2024) (Babarinde K. , 2015). Potential for Complacency: High retention rates may lead to complacency among members and leaders, as there may be less urgency to actively engage and connect with the broader community. Limited Diversity: Maintaining the same membership over time may result in a lack of diversity, both in terms of demographics and perspectives, potentially limiting the richness of the church community.

Dependency on key individuals: If a church relies heavily on a few key individuals for leadership or service roles, their departure can have a significant impact, leading to a potential leadership vacuum. Diminished Evangelism: A church primarily focused on retaining existing members may allocate fewer resources to outreach and evangelism, potentially limiting its ability to reach new individuals. Risk of Burnout: Long-term members who take on multiple responsibilities may experience burnout, impacting their overall well-being and potentially leading to a decrease in engagement. Balancing the advantages and disadvantages of church membership retention requires intentional efforts to foster a dynamic and inclusive community that welcomes new members while valuing the contributions of long-term attendees. A healthy church seeks both continuity and adaptability to fulfill its mission effectively.

### **Expectations from Church Members in Church Membership Retention**

This writer is of the opinion that if a local Baptist church desires retention, the total support and cooperation of the members of the church is needed without neglecting the use of artificial intelligence in a digitalized world. God has never given a vision to a man who is capable on his own to carry out the vision without the assistance of other people. Of necessity, the pastor must be called and prepared for the ministry and the members must be ready to surrender



themselves to carry out the purpose of God within the church and their community. Such church members' lives should be characterized with the following among others: Regenerated People – A church that will retain membership and continue to attract new members begins with regenerated members (Olatunde, 2023). Regenerated members will be more readily instrumental in the hands of God to carry out His plan for His church for repositioning. This is what we see in the New Testament church - *Then those who gladly received the word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them... and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:40-47)*. One could see that the foundation of the early church was based on regenerated membership. The people were not cajoled or lobbied or begged to be members of the church. They joined the church voluntarily based on personal conviction of faith in Jesus Christ. One singular factor for the spontaneous and sporadic growth of the early church is the genuine faith in the Lord. The lifestyle and activities of regenerated people of God attracted people to God. One major thing a minister of God needs to pursue above any other thing in the church is to introduce people to Christ. This is what the apostles of old did and they did not struggle for the church to grow. It is when people surrender their lives to Christ they can be useful to the Lord without any form of coercion. What the Lord expects from His people is relationship first before service (Mark 3:14). But it is the other way round in many churches today. What happens in many churches is that people are lobbied to the church for some other reasons outside the salvation of their souls and they are made to be involved in several religious activities when their hearts are not yet prepared for the ministry. "Doing" is often erroneously emphasized above "being."

Regenerated members are people who have surrendered their lives to the Lord and are heaven conscious. They are people who already made Christ their Lord and are living daily for Him. They are genuine Disciples of Christ. Since they have yielded their lives to the Lord, nothing is considered to be too much for them to surrender for His sake. They are ready tools (Apostles) in the hands of God for the growth of His church. Church growth and repositioning becomes easy where majority of the church members are born again children of God. The minister do not struggle much to lead the people and the work of God does not suffer for lack of people and material resources. It should be noted here that not all who attend church or who claim to be members of the church may be genuine believers at every given point in time. There may be some pretenders and "squatters" in the church like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) but they must not be many in the church where the word of God is making impact on



people's lives and they must not be allowed to give direction to the church (Adeniji, 2012). The best materials and instruments for Church Growth are regenerated members.

Disciplined Membership - Discipleship is a very crucial aspect of church membership retention. Unfortunately, this is a neglected part of church life. The early believers were actually called Disciples. The name "Christian" was a later development. The name was given by the outsiders who wanted to link the believers with Christ. What Christ commanded the church to make is disciples and not just Christians. "Go and make disciples of all nations..." was the order given to the church (Matthew 28:19). It is very glaring that the early church took the matter of discipleship very serious. *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized... and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. (Acts 2:41-42).* This gives the reason why the church was growing effortlessly. Those who believed were not just left on the pews to grow by themselves. They were assisted to grow to maturity. Their lifestyle was enough to attract people to the church without much struggle. Unfortunately, many churches do not have discipleship as a requirement for full membership today. This informed why even those who surrendered their lives to the Lord are not getting matured to take up serious responsibilities in the church. It has been discovered that believers that are not well-disciplined later constitute problem to the church. The headache of many churches is not unbelievers from outside, but undisciplined, spiritually immature members. These people may apply negative zeal to the matters of the church (Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, 2023). They turn out to be liabilities to the growth and repositioning of the church through her ministry units instead being assets. This is a major deficit to church growth. Only well disciplined members can stand the test of church growth. A church that desires a strong spiritual foundation does not play with discipleship. Discipleship goes beyond classroom teaching. It is a training in Christian lifestyle (Akanni, 2013). It is a means of impacting the lifestyle of Christ into the lives of church members. Those not properly disciples are best compared with the crowd following Jesus in those days (Akanni, 2013). They will surely leave when the bread is finished. Jesus knew their intention and did not fail to tell them this; *"most assuredly, I say unto you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled"* John 6:26. The crowd reduced to only twelve core disciples by the time Jesus finished His teaching that day. This is what the church is today. Many of our members are not strong enough to eat the raw word of God. I Cor. 3:1-2.



Committed Membership - Another characteristic of church members' lives for retention is Commitment. There are many interested people in church but only few committed ones. The difference between interest and commitment is determined by the extent to which each one is prepared to go. Like the Gideon Soldiers of old, thirty-two thousand people may show interest but only three hundred of them may be committed enough to risk their lives for the cause of the Lord (Judges 7). The percentage has not changed much in the church till date. While many people claim to be church members only few of them are committed to run the whole race of Commitment for the kingdom growth. Commitment to the kingdom work in the church should be at various levels. Every church member is expected to be committed to the mission of the church and the vision of the pastor. Where church membership is not cheapened and people are made to join the church in a proper way, commitment will be high. Church members are not supposed to be ordinary pew warmers. They are expected to be in attendance in church programmes and activities and be involved in one way or the other in the work of the ministry in the church (Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, 2023). Another level of commitment is in service. As mentioned earlier no church member is expected to be a spectator. The Bible makes it clear that everyone has been given at least a gift with which to profit: "*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each for the profit of all*" (1 Cor. 12:7). It is the duty of the pastor to assist each member to discover his/her gift and use it for the kingdom growth. Each of these gifts is given; *For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro.. Ephesians 4:12-14*). In a sense, every church member is expected to be a worker. No one is to be in the church only to receive grace from the other people without thinking of how to dispense grace to them. An ordinary member of the church is to aspire and be prepared to become a worker in the church. *Church workers are called to be committed to the church. The growth of any church is determined by the level of Commitment of the workers. Where workers are serious and committed to the mission of the church, there is bound to be growth. Commitment requires a lot of sacrifices, deep regard and concern for the interest of others as seen in tolerance, good neighbourliness, solidarity, humanness, courtesy and sportsmanship* (Fashola J.O and Fashola T.O, 2022). *Where people are taught and they imbibe the spirit of sacrificial commitment, the church will advance. Where people are deeply committed, the work of the ministry becomes easy to perform. People are ready to give themselves and their resources when they*



are committed to the course of the church. A church that grows is a church with high level of committed members.

Faithful Membership - Faithfulness is a requirement for service in the vineyard of God. The Bible says: "moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful"(1 Cor. 4:2)" For a church to have meaningful growth there must be faithful membership. It could be assumed that all members are faithful but experienced has proved contrary. Faithful members are the ones who are ready to serve God in the church with honesty of purpose. They serve with pure motive and release their resources as requested as good stewards. Faithful members do not need to be reminded of tithe and other obligations to the church. Faithful members of the church handle the church work and resources with a sense of honesty. It is very disturbing at times to see the way some people handle God's work. Many members of the church cannot handle their personal work the way they handle the work of the church. Many deliberately go late to church programmes and activities. Some waste church resources without any sense of guilt. Faithful members are expected to be good managers of the resources of the church. The church experiences growth in every dimension where there are faithful members who take God's work with seriousness. Pastor finds leadership easy where he deals with faithful people. Many things are taken care of without stress and the kingdom work runs smoothly in the atmosphere of faithfulness.

Available Membership - Another major quality of a growing church is available membership. There are many skillful people in the church but they are not available for the work of the ministry. The modern society is full of so many challenges that are contesting the time people would have normally given to kingdom work (Dairo, 2018). Many people now work late during the week and still go to work on weekends. Some academic studies are now scheduled for weekends for the working class, to make them work during the week and be in class on weekends. All of these additional curriculum activities leave little or no time for those who could have been very useful in the church. This makes the church to be full on Sundays for those who can make it and be empty during the week. One of the basic ways to demonstrate faithfulness is availability. If a church would experience growth, the members must be available for the ministry. It takes available persons to be involved in evangelism and the activities of the church. Availability does not mean one is not committed to other things outside the church; it means one gives priority to the work of God above any other one. When people of God present themselves as available vessels in the hands of God, the kingdom work will advance. Teachable Membership - Teachable members are humble



and growing members. They are the ones that aspire to know more and are not tired of learning. They are genuine disciples who can adapt themselves to any situation so they can please their God. A teachable member of the church is always ready to take instruction under the leadership of the church pastor and run to carry out his assignment without being forced to do so. He does not rely on experience or his social status to do the work of God. He allows the Holy Spirit and church leadership to lead him to do the right thing. The spirit of humility is seen in life of teachable members regardless of their social status. Teachable members are those who wish to grow themselves and therefore wish the church to grow. They are not satisfied with yesterday's achievements or attainment. They always look forward to a better or higher level of development. Where a church has many teachable people around, there is bound to be growth.

Loving Membership - Loving people create an atmosphere of peace and growth. This is what church atmosphere is supposed to be. The Founder of the church orders; *A new command I give to you, that you love another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)*. Love has become the trade mark of the Christians. This was quite evident in the life of the early church. The believers loved themselves to the point that no one claimed ownership of anything. *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common and breaking bread from house to house... (Acts 2:46)*. *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they all had all things in common. (Acts 4:32)*. This is one of the major secrets of the growth of the early church. There was genuine love in display. A loving community is always a fertile ground for growth. This is where you can find genuine fellowship. Peoples' needs are met without fanfares. People are ready to serve one another without thinking of personal gains. Service is placed above self. Loving membership is a needed matter for Church Growth.

Ministry Focused Membership - What does it mean to be a member of a local church? It means you have made a commitment (Romans 12:1). We are no longer conformed to this world's directives, but instead we take our orders from Heaven itself. When we join the local church, we state publicly that we are taking up the banner of Jesus Christ as expressed through His local congregation. We are saying: "I am here—in this local body." "I will be here—to worship and to serve in this local body." "I will serve—gladly when called upon in this local body." "I will pray—that Jesus Christ will be glorified in this local body." "I will give—of my time, talents, and possessions to build up this local



body." We are also saying, when we join a local expression of the church, "I agree." "I agree—in the doctrinal or confessional stands of this congregation." "I agree—in the practices of this local congregation." "I agree—in the essential program of this local congregation."

To this writer, to join a local church means that you are making yourself accountable to other believers in a formal way. For example, in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira had converted to Christ and joined the local congregation in Jerusalem. They made certain commitments, but then decided that those commitments were too costly to uphold. So then, they broke their faith with the church, lied to the congregation and God, and as a result were accountable to the church leadership. We are accountable to the church body of which we are members. Members of the church are also responsible to every other member of the church. When you associate with the local church, you are asking for help in keeping true to your baptismal vows, and you are pledging your support in helping others stay faithful as well. Being a part of the local church means you have publicly identified with a local expression of the universal church of Jesus Christ. You are not merely "floating" from one body to another, but are known as a part of a definite local church body. This is achieved by the following means of ministry opportunities: Children, Youth Ministries (Youth/Teens/BSF), Men's Fellowship, Royal Ambassadors, Women's Fellowship, *Lydia*, *Girls' Auxiliary*, *Sunbeam Band*, Evangelism & Global Missions, Medical mission, prayers, Teaching, Music, Ushering, Drama, Outreach/In-reach, Children/Teenagers, Prayer, Media/publicity, Counseling, Help (Visitation/Welfare), Discipleship, Social (Copers, Prison, Education, Hospital, Police, Legal, Decoration, Vocational, Aged), House Fellowship, Youth/Student, Medical ministry, Deacons' Fellowship, House Fellowship centers among others (Tijani T. O., 2019).

Dynamic Membership - In church membership retention, members of the units must reposition their units to be more relevant to present people. Members must learn to emulate the Spirit of Christ so that they will not just be participants but partakers of the glory God. The following can be done to add life and colour to church programmes: Recreate: This is to re-design what is in existence. To add life and colour to the programmes, enriching the units' activities. Programme must be better done. Creativity in the presentation of programmes is highly recommended. There may be need to change the date, day, venue, time and arrangement of the meeting place (Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, 2023). Initiate: Something new could be brought to formal meetings, discontinue with the same old way.

Initiate a project to better the lives of other people. Let the organization meet needs of her members and be interested in their concerns. You can sponsor some people to retreats and workshops. Protect: This is to guard jealously that which the church has. Unit leaders are expected to protect unit of the church ministry from erosion of disinterest, distress, dissatisfaction, disunity, deception, distrust, dissuasion, dissolution, dissipation, disservice, disruption, defeat, detachment, distraction, diversion or division (Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, 2023).

Supportive membership - Another major quality in church membership retention, is the ability of the members to give scholarship, bursary awards, search for jobs and assist the less privilege. If a church would experience growth, the members must be available for the ministry of welfare and care especially for the younger generation. It takes serious empathy for the teeming youthful population to be rightfully engaged in the society before reaching out to them.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

**Table 1:** The Gender of respondents in some selected Associations in Lagos East Baptist Conference, Lagos, Nigeria.

Gender /Associations	Association A	Association B	Association C	Association D	Association E	Total	Percentage
Male	32	30	34	26	27	149	59.6%
Female	18	20	16	24	23	101	40.4%
Total	50	50	50	50	50	250	100%

Source:

Table 1 above shows that male respondents who took part in the research were more than their female counterparts in terms of population in some selected associations in Lagos East Baptist Conference, Lagos, Nigeria because 59.6% of the respondents are male while 40.4% are female.

Table 2: Classification of the Respondents Based on the number of different churches they have attended before settling down in their current selected Churches of the Associations of the Lagos East Baptist Conference, Lagos, Nigeria.

Associations/Number of Churches	Association A	Association B	Association C	Association D	Association E	Total	Percentage
One Church	7	6	4	6	10	33	13.2%
Two churches	21	14	11	19	12	77	30.8%
Three churches	15	20	24	16	13	88	35.2%
Four churches	6	6	7	6	8	33	13.2%
Five & Above churches	1	4	4	3	7	19	7.6%
Total	50	50	50	50	50	250	100%

**Source:**

Table 2 above suggests that 13.2% of the members had attended a Baptist church all their lives, 30.8% had attended two different churches, 35.2% have attended three different churches, 13.2% have attended four different churches, and 7.6% had attended more than five different churches. Therefore, we can conclude that the opinions of the respondents can be trusted as far as the nexus between new church members and church membership retention is concerned since the majority (35.2%) have attended a minimum of three different churches.

**Table 3:** Research Question: What is the Nexus between New Church Members and Membership Retention?

S / N	QUESTION ITEMS	YES	NO	TOTAL	% YES	% NO	% TOTAL
1	Do you agree that Spiritual Engagement such as worship services, prayer groups, community outreach, and the use of Artificial Intelligence can positively connect a new church member and membership retention?	241	09	250	96.4%	3.6%	100%
2	It is true that Doctrinal Alignment – individual's beliefs and the church's teachings can foster a sense of purpose and identity?	235	15	250	94%	6%	100%
3	Do you agree that pastoral care, welfare and visitation can be a nexus between a new church member and church membership retention?	244	06	250	95%	5%	100%

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4	Do you agree that new members' class is one of the nexuses for church membership retention?	155	95	250	97.6%	2.4%	100%
5	Can inclusivity and acceptance of new members promote church membership retention?	200	50	250	80%	20%	

From table 3 above, 96.4% of the respondents said yes to question item 1 while 3.6% said no, 94% of the respondents said yes to question item 2 while 6% said no, 95% of the respondents said yes to question item 3 while 5% said no, 97.6% of the respondents said yes to question item 4 while 2.4% said no, Hence, we can conclude that some of the contributing nexus between New Church Members and Membership Retention include: Spiritual Engagement such as worship services, prayer groups, community outreach, Artificial Intelligence, Doctrinal Alignment, pastoral care, welfare and visitation, new members' class and last but not the least inclusivity and acceptance of new members into church membership.

### Conclusion

Learning these essential membership responsibilities in church membership retention that support attracting and retaining church members cannot be overemphasized. If churches intend to support individuals, families, and the community, it is imperative for the members to understand the factors that support church membership and retention. This study will help both pastors and members to build successful strategies for their congregations that have been demonstrated and implemented in growing churches. In essence, this study has the intention to be a model that can be replicated by other churches worldwide.

### Recommendations

In the light of the above literature review and discussions, this writer suggests that both the pastorate and the Church be purpose-driven by creating a welcoming atmosphere, engage in the use of artificial intelligence actively participating in fellowship activities, small groups, and community events that helps build relationships within the church. Contributing time and skills through volunteer work not only supports the church's activities but also helps members feel a sense of purpose and investment in the community.



Encouraging and participating in prayer groups, Bible studies, and other spiritual growth activities contributes to the overall spiritual health of the church for all.

Establishing mentoring relationships or engaging in discipleship programs helps newer members integrate into the church community. Demonstrating genuine care and concern for fellow members during times of joy, sorrow, or need builds a supportive community.

Actively inviting friends, family, and acquaintances to church events and services helps grow the community.

Among other recommendations, members should be available, dependable, committed and teachable members.

These are skills that causes membership retention not only in the Baptist churches but in any denomination in the entire universe.

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