

# CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST FILLING THE BOAT

The question has been asked, Why are the Youth leaving Celestial Church of Christ and what can we do to stop the exodus and in addition what can be done to reclaim those who have already left?

Some of the youth leaders deliberated over this age-old question pondering why we are continually asked this same question and is this really a youth problem?

Are we not losing just as many adults as youth? Look around your parish, how many new faces did you see for one Sunday, a couple of Sundays and then never see their faces again?

What have we done to attract and retain new members? What have we done or are we doing to retain the adults in the Church, the families, anyone?

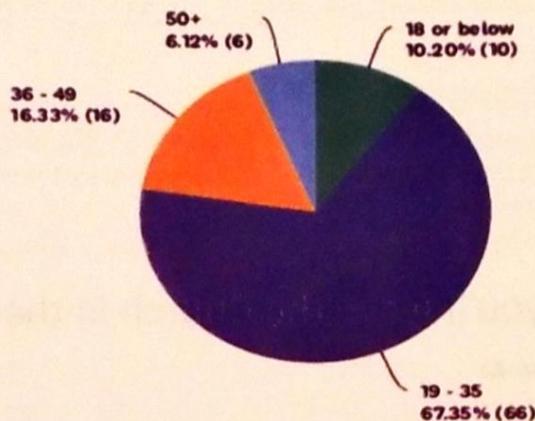
The Youth put out a survey trying to understand the problem by digging into our goal first. We want to keep and grow the church membership, so what is motivating the current membership to stay in the church?

We surveyed almost 200 members of Celestial Church globally.

Per the chart below, almost 80% of respondents fall primarily in that "youth" age bracket. Thus this is viably a representative data set of the youth and their mindset regarding the questions asked in the Survey.

## Age

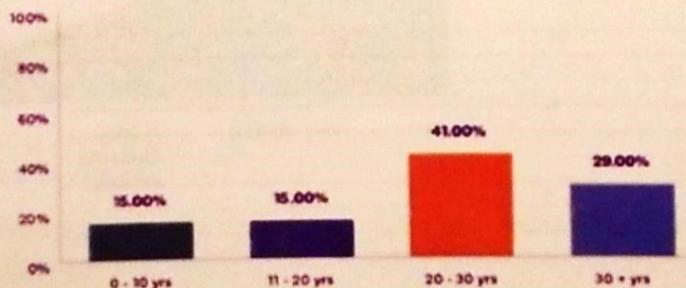
Answered: 98 Skipped: 84



From the other statistical data requested, about 70% of the respondents were born in Celestial which lines up with the chart below on the length of time people have been members of the church. And only 20% of the respondents have left Celestial at one point or the other and returned.

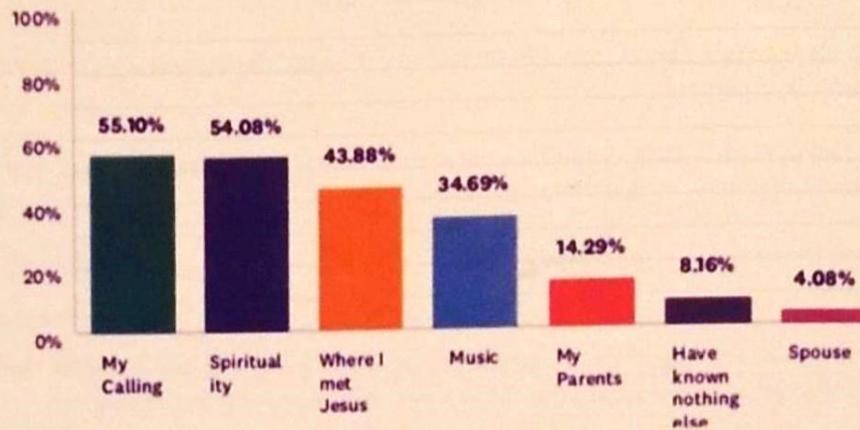
## How long have you been a member of Celestial Church

Answered: 100 Skipped: 82



So in line with our strategy of digging into our goal first; which is to keep and grow the current youth membership; we tried to understand why people have remained members of Celestial Church.

Answered: 98 Skipped: 84



The interesting thing about the data is that for majority of those who have stayed, it is a very personal decision. People feel they have been called to be in this church and that is a difficult sentiment to inspire or infect. It is something people feel they have heard from God about and in line with the rest of the statistics we will review later in this write up, about 1 out of ever 2 youth in Celestial Church of Christ believe this is the Church God has chosen for them.

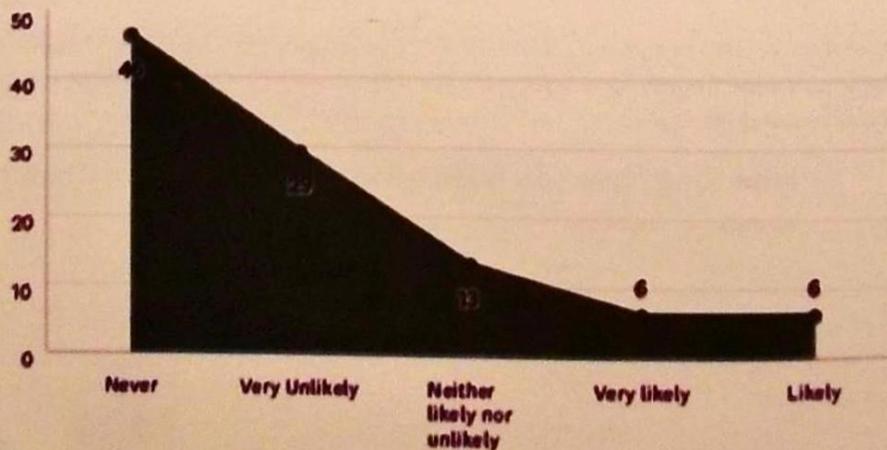
The spirituality of the Church is a close second reason but one that can be easily skewed. For some spirituality is their insatiable thirst and desire for the gift of prophecy which is a strong trademark of Celestial Church. For others it is the mode of worship, the tangible instruments of worship we afford them access to, from holy water to candles and incense and for a few it is that spiritual connection to heaven. Again another reason that holds its own personal interpretation for each person; in fact the top three reasons all have an individual/personal aura to it.

We bring this up to say that there is a half of the youth whose primary driver for remaining members of Celestial is personal. Outside influence will do very little to change their perspective. So what does that tell us? It is a good news/bad news dichotomy. On one hand we have half the youth that cannot or refuse to be influenced to leave the church, but the bad news is that there is another 50% who are in real danger of leaving the church in the future.

And this next question corroborates that concern

## Probability you'll leave the Church in the future

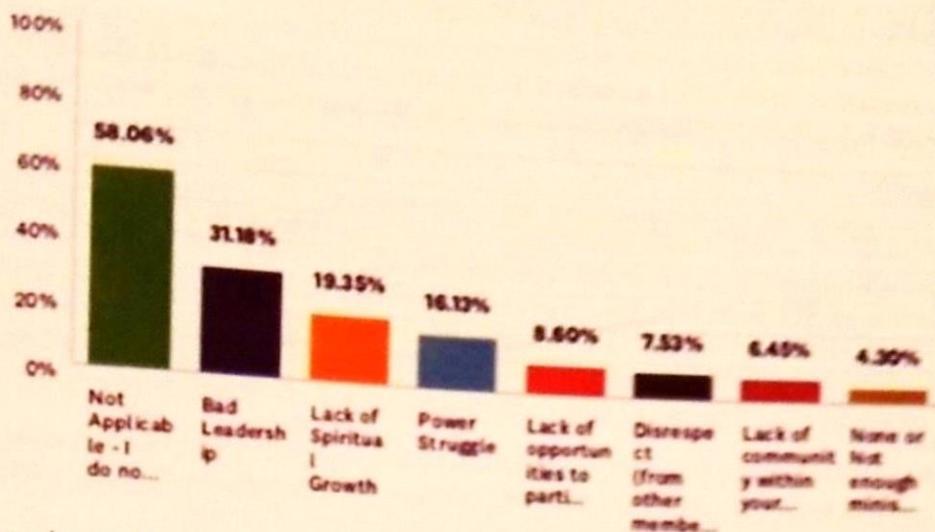
Answered: 99 Skipped: 83



Again almost half of the respondents declare unequivocally that they will not leave the church; but just half. What about the other 50%, what are the primary drivers motivating the possibility of their leaving the church?

# What is the likeliest reason you would consider leaving the Church

Answered: 93 Skipped: 89



The winner here is the lack of good, sound leadership. That seems to be the biggest reason for people who feel there is a possibility of them leaving the church. One of the written responses paraphrased says, "The Church seems to be dominated by old people who inhibit the growth and development of young leaders. The average member is 45-65! ... Too many rude and disrespectful adults in Celestial. The church isn't not open to non-Nigerians; many speak too much Yoruba not giving room for diversity and inclusion. Too many uneducated leaders! ... But are placed in high positions of authority!"

In reviewing these responses and some of the written responses, the primary reason people stay is the primary reason they leave.

1st reason the God they serve and the 2nd reason are the people who serve them.

Regarding the 1st reason, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. If someone feels God has called them to leave the church or they strongly felt God isn't answering their prayers in the church then there is nothing any elder or member of the church can do. As Jacob said in Genesis 30 vs. 2 "...Am I in God's stead". When your problem or issue is with God, then only God can solve, salvage, redeem or keep that person.

So then to the second reason, People leave because of the people who serve them.

Based on the survey where we see bad leadership and power struggle as prominent reasons for people leaving then our first recommendation is

## ◆ Create more servant leaders

Mark 10 vs. 45 – None of us are here to be served, but to serve... Can both leader and fellow members of the Church accept and perform the role of servant?

Motivational Speaker Simon Sinek says "Leadership is not about being in charge, it is about taking care of those in your charge" How can we train great leaders within the current youth population whose priority is service of others and how can the current leadership change their mindset?

\*National Leadership seminars, Local Lunch and Learns run by contemporary leaders in the church with a practical effective well thought-out curriculum

## ◆ Be Exemplary

Hebrews 12 vs. 1 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us..." Can we together live and be the examples we want others to follow?

\*Clear code of conduct rules with predefined penalties for breaking them to ensure there is no ambiguity on expectations and penalties for unchristian-like behavior in the church

## ◆ Do Not Judge

James 14 vs. 11 "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

The current generation of millennials is raised in the world that tells them the first part of 1st Corinthians 6 vs. 12a – "Everything is permissible." Due to that, you will have youth who feel tattoos, piercings, different hair types and styles are all ok, others who are very opinionated. But as long as they are not defying the laws of God, you shouldn't judge or excommunicate them. If you truly feel they need to be redeemed or changed, then how do you accomplish that by excommunicating them? And what of outward appearance has to do with God, he looks at the heart of men. Have you been able to discern their hearts? Their works? Their walk? All that is asked is that as leaders to complete more than a cursory investigation of anyone whose outward appearance you disapprove of before castigating him or her. If the church is full of saints, then what is its purpose?

#### ◆ **Better Engagement**

*Job 32 vs. 7-10* - "...Spirit of God not Age brings wisdom and understanding"

Idle hands are the devils workshop. When you create a service, community and church that doesn't actively engage youth involvement then you are essentially telling them they are unimportant.

Look at your daily Sunday service, what is the level of youth engagement? Are they simply messengers you can send to and fro in the church or are you entrusting them with critical responsibilities mandatory to produce a successful service day?

Lack of engagement with the youth will ensure disengaged Celestians and ultimately a prime candidate to depart from the church

#### ◆ **Better Dynamism**

*James 2 vs. 15-16* "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

A church is a community and an avenue for camaraderie, social engagement and growth.

We need more social conscious programs impacting youth introduced.

Not every problem needs seven elders prayer and a midnight revival. Sometimes we just need to provide what is needed. Whether it is counseling, scholarship programs, health checkups, and money management seminars. Set tangible time aside for your congregation to participate in this vents that will help enrich their lives outside of the church

#### ◆ **More Inclusive**

*Galatians 3 vs. 28* "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

We are a Christian Church, not a Nigerian or Yoruba Church. Many of the leaders are more concerned about the cultural misgivings of youth and individuals in the church that they are about the Christianity within.

And then there is the being considerate and inclusive of all the other cultures, tongues and people within the congregation. There is nothing wrong with sprinkling a Yoruba verse in a song or a prayer here and there. But conducting majority of a service and the songs in Yoruba is utterly inconsiderate and alienating and ostracizing people we have the commission to save and bring to Christ. When in Rome act like Romans, when in America conduct majority of all service ministrations in English. The Spirit of God speaks English also, so continually claiming that the spirit is inspiring the Yoruba direction is unacceptable.

\*Shepherds, Choir Masters, Parochial Committee presidents, please mandate the requirement within your parishes

#### ◆ **Youth, take the initiative**

*Proverbs 6 vs. 6-9* "6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: 7 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, 8 Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. 9 How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?"

To the Youth, do not wait to be called any longer. Identify the gaps in your individual parishes and fill them. If you feel there is bad leadership, then become and exemplary leader to the younger ones in your church and give them someone and something to aspire to. If you feel there are things you can add to help the church administratively or technologically, then bring it forward to the church and take control of it.

You and I, we will not always get the call we want or get tapped on the shoulder always but the Lord speaks and inspires. And if you feel the Lord has woken something up within you, then press forward and take charge. If the people in leadership think you are too young to handle anything tangible in the church, then prove them wrong by taking control of something within your purview and responsibly managing it.

We are as culpable for our inactivity in the church as the elders, who have neglected us, but we can change that now and I am challenging us to change it.

All you need is a bit of determination, some perseverance and ultimately support. But be a support to one another, form your youth ministries within your parishes and stand for something productive, manage your Sunday school ministries and direct the future of the younger ones in your parish. Create or take control of your church website, propose contemporary initiatives that will attract new members and keep others

Look through your parish, at the faces of all the young people you see. Count them out and imagine what the church will look like with only half of them as members. The statistics are there for all to see. 1 out of every 2 youth in the church today is at risk of leaving. Let us wake up and begin to play our part in ending the exodus.