

## **ABSTRACT**

### **BEST PRACTICES OF CHURCH PLANTING: A CASE STUDY OF ECWA AND OTHER CHURCHES IN THE WEST COAST REGION OF THE GAMBIA**

by

**Lawrence B. Jah**

The church is the primary vehicle of our Missionary God in fulfilling his redemptive purpose for the unreached, unchurched, disconnected and broken world in contemporary times as this. The irony, however, is that, even though Christianity had reached the West Coast Region of The Gambia for over two hundred years, nevertheless, Christians are barely eight percent of the population of 1.9 million, while Islam is ninety and Traditional Worshippers two percent. This is compounded by the fact that, the majority of pastors whether ECWA or not, in this geographical location, are non- Gambians.

Ironically, most of these pastors are engaged in reaching out to believers who are already in a particular church setting, thereby forsaking their heavenly assignment of sharing the unchanging message of salvation to the unreached people groups among the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This study is therefore critical for all Pastors, Church Planters, Missiologists and the Priesthood of Believers, as it opens their eyes to the fact that Muslims are an integral part of God's Missional mandate (Matt.28:18-20), and they could be won over for Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit, if only the best practices of planting indigenous churches are implemented in the targeted population of this study. The relevance of this project is underscored by the fact that, Islam is not only the second largest religion in the world (1.8 billion), but the

fastest growing religion globally, as evident in The Gambia, a country with a population of 1.9 million.

Missiologist, John Mark Terry's five key approaches to Evangelistic/Church Planting Methods among Muslims (314-316), discussed in my Literature Review, provided a framework for this Qualitative and Pre-intervention study, on Church Planting in the Muslim Majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This study therefore explored the extent to which Mark Terry's approaches to CPM hold true for the planting of indigenous churches in the subject population. In the light of this, I focused on identifying the best practices of planting indigenous churches, in ECWA and other churches in the subject population of this project. In order to achieve the purpose of this project, I recruited twenty- nine participants on the basis of their wealth of experiences and knowledge on church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Through a Focus Group Study and Semi-Structured Interview Protocol among the recruited research participants, the data generated and analyzed, resulted in the discovery of seven best practices of Church Planting and seven major findings that should inform the practice of ministry in the targeted population of this project.

In the light of these findings, coupled with the recommendations made in this study, the need for a paradigm shift in the approach to Church Planting in a Muslim context is non-negotiable, if Pastors /Church Planters are to actualize the Missional mandate among the unreached people groups in their communities. The study therefore showed that, there is no one best practices of CPM. Subsequently, Church Planters have to depend upon the Holy Spirit both for the choice of methods for CPM, and the

application of any of the findings for the practices of ministry in any given geographical location. This project is therefore a wake-up call not only for Pastors, and Church Planters in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, but for the priesthood of believers in the community under study, and those outside the scope of this study. This is evident from the fact that, the church, as a partner in kingdom Building, is a Living Organism that should be concerned not only with numbers, programs, and attendance in a particular denomination, but with reaching the least, the last and the lost in fulfilment of the missional mandate of which the Muslims are an integral part of.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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## CHAPTER 1

### NATURE OF THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides the framework on the best practices of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. I was challenged to investigate this issue against the background of my personal experiences indicated in the study. Moreover, the chapter brings out the Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Project, and the Research Questions which guided this study, with the primary objective of addressing this burning issue of identifying the best practices of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The rationales for exploring such a critical ministry issue, are also highlighted; these serve as propelling factors in objectively investigating the dynamics of indigenous church planting in a Muslim context. Included in this overview, is the definition of technical terms used in the study to enable the reader get a vivid understanding of the subject of church planting in my ministry context.

The chapter also highlights those who are included and excluded from this study. This helped to narrow the scope of the field of study and enabled me to articulate the relevant facts surrounding the investigation. A brief review of the relevant literature on church planting was also done with the objective of bringing out examples of outstanding scholarly writers on the methods, barriers and suggested best practices of church planting, in the subject population of this Qualitative study. Moreover, the chapter explores the research methodology of this study, by briefly shedding light on the



following issues: the type of research, participants engaged with, appropriate data collection and analysis used, to help answer the Research Questions that align with the Purpose Statement of this study. This is followed by the generalizability of the project. Finally, in order to prepare the mind of the readers in anticipation of the rest of the project, a summary sentence on the remaining chapters of this study is clearly articulated.

### **Autobiographical Introduction**

As a missionary from Sierra Leone, in the Muslim majority nation of The Gambia, for twenty years, I taught in a secondary school, namely St. Joseph's Senior Secondary School for seven years, then served as the National Director of an interdenominational Christian organization, Scripture Union Ministry, for sixteen years. In the course of this period, I was and I am privileged to walk closely with students, teachers, and pastors from various denominational backgrounds. These various target groups in my ministry context are members from various churches in The Gambia. I also currently serve as one of the pastors of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). In my capacity as National Director of Scripture Union and Pastor of one of the ECWA Churches, I was greatly concerned about the dynamics of the church planting methods by ECWA and other churches in a predominantly Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

What puzzled me most was the fact that, in spite of over two hundred years of Christianity in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, the composition of the membership in various churches in the communities were predominantly non-Gambians, except for the main line churches like the: Anglican, Methodist, and Roman

Catholic. Moreover, very few of the converts came from a Muslim background. This has therefore created room for me to investigate the methods, through which churches are planted, by the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and other denominations in my targeted population for this study.

My “big dream” is to see ECWA and other churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, implementing the best practices of church planting that would reach the indigenes in the predominantly Muslim context. I am confident that, such changes in ministry practice would subsequently give birth to the establishment of indigenous churches in my ministry context. This passion to reach the unreached people group in a Muslim majority community of The Gambia, was triggered in me while I served as National Director of Scripture Union (2002-2015) and Pastor of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in January, 2015.

To an Evangelical church, the need for evangelism in obedience to the Great Commission is key. Though ECWA churches have been involved in a ministry among Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, for over fifteen years, it is ironical that, fewer churches have been planted in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Most of the churches are located in the urban and not the rural areas.

In the determination of ECWA pastors to plant churches in the subject population of this study, an evangelistic team comprising of pastors and members from the headquarter church, would board the church van along with musical instruments. On arrival, the Word of God would be shared following some song ministrations. This created a platform for the people in that given community to listen to the gospel of salvation. Since the people in Brikama, are predominantly Muslims, the people would

hardly come out for fear of facing persecution from their Muslim colleagues or family members in the neighborhood. Alternatively, they would stay in their houses and listen from a distance. Subsequently only the little children and a few people in that community would respond to the unchanging Gospel message. Prominent among the converts were people from other denominational backgrounds, such as: Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), Church of Pentecost, Roman Catholic and Methodist and not Muslim converts.

Therefore members of ECWA and other churches, are usually not converts from the Islamic faith, but are from other denominational backgrounds. Ironically even though these converts are from other churches/denominations, the life styles of most of them reveal that the character of Christ has not been formed in them. One main reason for this was the failure of the leadership of ECWA and some of the other churches to engage in a systematic discipleship programme for all the converts with the objective of producing transformed-life believers in the community of faith. This therefore poses a lot of challenges to the churches, because, some converts still practiced some of their traditional practices such as speaking to the spirit of the dead, drunkenness etc. A number of them would be in the church with the mind set of what they could get from the church not what they could give to the church. I can vividly recall the time when the leadership of ECWA church, organized a three-day revival programme from 28th -30th April, 2015. They had to provide transportation to ensure that ECWA members from other satellite stations could benefit from the revival service.

In addition to this, ECWA churches that are planted in various parts of the West Coast Region of The Gambia are made to depend financially on the headquarter church,

covering payment of rent for: the church premises, transportation and electricity bills. This dependency syndrome of the newly planted churches had been of great concern in my ministry context as the Resident Pastor of the Headquarter church. This church planting strategy was also true of some of the other churches engaged in this study.

If the planting of churches in the Muslim majority area of West Coast Region is to have the desired effect, this calls for a paradigm shift in the church planting methods by the pastors of both ECWA and some other churches engaged in this project. Against this background, I was challenged to address this burning issue in my ministry context.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The history of church planting in the predominantly Muslim Mandinka population of the Gambia namely, the West Coast Region show that, the leadership of ECWA and other churches have not established indigenous churches with converts from an Islamic background, who have been disciplined to plant more churches in obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19-20).

This gloomy picture of church planting in my ministry context is vividly painted by Martha Frederiks, a Methodist missionary saying “five and a half centuries of Christian endeavour in The Gambia did not lead to mass conversion of either traditional believers or Muslims to Christianity...all forms of evangelization of the Mandinka failed”( 2,59). In the light of this, it is apparent that, even though the leadership of ECWA and other churches have been engaged in church planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia for decades, there are only a few converts from the Islamic background. On the contrary the majority of the converts are primarily from other denominational backgrounds (sheep stealing) instead of the Islamic faith.

Moreover, except for the mainline churches, most pastors of ECWA and other Churches are non- Gambians, in spite of the fact that, the history of Christianity in West Cost Region could be traced to over five hundred years. This therefore calls for a paradigm shift in church planting methods, if indigenous churches are to be planted by the leadership of ECWA and other churches in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this study was to identify best practices for church planting by the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and other churches within the Muslim communities in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, with the hope of seeing more indigenous churches planted in this area.

### **Research Questions**

I designed three Research Questions which aligned with the purpose statement of this study. RQ1 focused on the current methods of church planting in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, RQ2 focused on the barriers to planting indigenous churches among the targeted population. RQ3 centered on identifying best practices of CPM in a Muslim majority context. Subsequently the interview questions (See Appendix A, B and C), were intentionally tailored to align with both the purpose statement and the respective research questions which guided this study.

**Research Question #1** What are the methods of church planting by the leadership of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and other churches in the Muslim communities of the West Coast Region of The Gambia?

**Research Question #2** What are the greatest barriers to the planting of indigenous churches by the leadership of ECW A and other churches in the Muslim communities of the West Coast Region of The Gambia?

**Research Question #3** What best practices for church planting within Muslim communities in the West Coast Region can be drawn from this study of methods and barriers?

### **Rationale for the Project**

First and foremost, this project matters because, church planting has a biblical justification. The biblical mandate of Jesus Christ spelt out in the Great Commission is quite explicit, which is, the art of making disciples of all nations (Matt.28:18-20). Other related passages in support of church planting are: Lk 24: 45-47; Jh.20:21-23, and Acts1:8. In spite of the fact that the instruction to plant churches is not explicit in the Great Commission, it is however, in the course of making disciples that churches are planted. Church planting is therefore not an end, but a means to an end, which subsequently fulfils the Mission of God in reaching every people group with the unchanging message of salvation.

Second, the Muslim regions of the globe are included in God's redemptive plan of salvation. In light of this, the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, is an integral part of God's creation. Since our Heavenly Father is the Missionary God from eternity past, the salvation of the Muslim is central to the fulfilment of the missional mandate for the fulfilment of the redemptive plan of God. This therefore justifies the reason for engaging in a study of identifying the best practices of church planting in the Muslim majority community of The Gambia.

The third reason why this study matters is that, church planting has a theological basis. A closer look at the following verses: shed light on the fact that, the church is not actually a building, nor an organization or denomination but an organism or people: Matt.18:17-20; Acts 8:1; 19: 32, 39, 41; 1Cor.11:17-18; 14:4-5. The church is therefore the “hands” and “feet” of our missionary God. The word church, has its root in a Greek word, “ekklesia” which is coined from two Greek words “ek” and “kaleo” meaning “called out”. This implies that, the use of the word ‘church’ in the New Testament means “called out ones”. This meaning of the word ‘church’ in the New Testament, is similar meaning to the word “assembly” in the Septuagint, a reference to the call of Israel as a nation in the wilderness. In light of this theological background on church planting, evidently, neither Jesus’ disciples nor the early church expressly planted churches (physical structures) but proclaimed the message of salvation to every people group. Against this background, that this study is focused on identifying the best practices of church planting in my ministry context.

The fourth reason why this study matters is due to demographic factors. Though the population size of The Gambia is approximately 1.9 million, with ninety percent Muslims, eight percent Christians and two percent Traditional Worshippers, the West Coast Region of The Gambia constitute fifty two percent of the total population of The Gambia. The ethnic groups in the West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia are primarily Mandinka and Jola. Forty one percent and ten percent respectively of the country’s total population. This implies that, both ethnic groups constitute over half of the population size of The Gambia. The Mandinka are broadly representative of The

Gambia in many fundamental respects. This implies that, an effective church planting strategy in the West Coast Region of The Gambia will give birth to a greater percentage of transformed believers who will occupy strategic positions in the political, economic, educational, civil, social and judicial arms of the government. I am confident that, this will subsequently usher in lasting positive impacts in these various sectors, since the church serves as an agent of change in a given society.

The fifth reason why this study matters is on economic grounds. The Mandinka and Jola ethnic groups who comprise forty and tenpercent respectively, of the population in the West Coast Region of The Gambia are adherents to numerous syncretistic practices, prior to their conversion experience. This therefore calls for a properly designed discipleship programme aiming at producing a transformative community.

A closer study of the way of life of both the Mandinka and Jola ethnic groups, show that, these two major ethnic groups are not only difficult to convert to the Christian faith, but even the few who are won over to the Christian faith continue, to adhere to their traditional practices, like: sorcery, talking to the spirit of the dead and preserving food for the deceased. These traditional practices extract a lot of financial costs on the indigenes. I am confident that, if the primary ethnic groups in the West Coast Region are reached through an effective method of church planting, those converted will not only live in a transformed community, but they would save a lot of finances that could be used both to develop their family lives and sow into the kingdom of God, towards the planting of more indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.



The sixth reason why this study matters is based on educational advancement. This project would create room for the establishment of more mission oriented senior secondary schools in the Western Division of The Gambia and subsequently cut the financial cost of schooling a child outside the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This is evident from the fact that, though over half of the population of the Gambia are found in the West Coast Region, ironically, there are only few senior secondary schools in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The challenge of insufficient secondary schools to meet the increasing demand of students from junior secondary schools had caused some parents to send their children/wards from some of the near bye towns in the West Coast Region like: Gunjur, Marakissa, and Darsalimi to attend senior secondary schools in Brikama, being the Administrative Headquarters. Similarly, others send their children/wards from Brikama, to other Mission schools in Banjul, the capital city of The Gambia. An attempt by the government of The Gambia to provide a number of school buses to address this challenge has not brought a solution to this growing need for more senior schools in the West Coast Region. Subsequently, planting indigenous churches would serve as a bridge to the establishment of more mission schools in the targeted population for this project. As churches are planted, provision will also be made by the respective educational boards of the churches for the establishment of more senior secondary schools that could serve as a platform for the spread of the Christian faith. With the establishment of Christian educational institutions, coupled with Christian teachers on staff, they would serve as agents of changes in that community; through their life style and proclamation of the message of reconciliation. It is noteworthy that, even though the WCR is a Muslim majority region, nevertheless, the parents in the community

place great value on mission schools, due to the high standard of education that is upheld in Christian educational institutions.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

i. *Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)* refers to the name of a specific church denomination in The Gambia founded by Sudan Interior Mission in Nigeria in 1893. This denomination was originally called Evangelical Church of West Africa, but rebranded Evangelical Church Winning All in 2010. This change was due to the planting of churches beyond West Africa, in other parts of the globe like East Africa, and the Western World such as the USA and UK.

ii. *ECWA* is the abbreviation used for Evangelical Church Winning All. The administrative head quarters of ECWA is found in Jos, Nigeria.

iii. Best practices, are the most efficient and effective ways or methods through which churches are planted among the unreached people groups among the Muslims, thereby resulting in the establishment of a life transformed community that would plant more churches in a Muslim majority context.

iv. *Church Planting* refers to the entire process of evangelizing, discipling, training, and mentoring a given group of believers to a level of development, which enables it to function as a thriving church under the leadership of a pastor, independent of the agent(s) who brought it into being.

v. A *Muslim* is a person who is committed to peace by striving to follow the pattern of righteousness and justice revealed by God. The Arabic word Muslim, refers to a man while Muslima to a woman. However, the literal meaning of these two persons is

“one who submits to God’s teachings and commandments which leads to peace”(Jalil and Kerr 1).

vi. *Muslim community* is a term used to describe a geographical environment which is predominantly Muslim.

vii. *West Coast Region(WCR)* is one of the Divisional Headquarters of The Gambia, created by the independent Electoral Commission in 2007, in accordance to article 192 of the National Constitution. The Gambia as a nation, is divided into five Administrative Regions among which is the West Coast Region. The administrative regions of the West Coast Region are: Kombo North, Kombo South, Kombo Central, Kombo East, Foni Brefet, and Brikama. The latter serves as the administrative headquarters for the Western Division. The West Coast Region constitutes 699,204 out of a total population of 1.9 million, with the Mandinka being the predominant ethnic group, followed by the Jola as the second largest ethnic group. The religions are: Muslim ninety percent, Traditional worshippers two percent, and Christians eight percent.

viii. *The Mandinka or Mandigoes* are the largest ethnic group in The Gambia. They constitute forty two percent of the population of The Gambia. They are strict adherents to the Islamic faith and predominantly found in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

On the contrary, the Jola are among the earliest inhabitants of the Gambia. They constitute ten percent of the population of The Gambia and are found primarily in the Foni District of the Western Division of The Gambia. The Jola preserve and perpetuate

their Jola culture and traditions and many of them are animists. This explains the fact that those among the Jola who embrace the Christian faith still hold on to syncretism.

ix. *Indigenous*: are primarily the natives of the land in The Gambia, such as the various ethnic groups that are settled in the country. Among them are: the Wolof, Mandinka, Fula, Jola, Aku, Serehule, Manjango, Serers, and the Balanta.

x. *The Gambia* is one of the smallest countries in West Africa with a population of 1.9 million. It has five administrative regions, namely: West Coast Region, North Bank Region, Central River Division, Upper River Division, and a city, namely Banjul. The Gambia is a Muslim majority nation with ninety Muslims, eight percent Christians and two percent Traditional Worshippers.

### **Delimitations**

This study was concerned specifically with church planting in the Muslim community of Brikama, (head quarters of the West Coast Region), and four of the rural areas in the West Coast Region of the Gambia, namely: Gunjur, Darsalami, Marakissa, and Siffoe located in (Kombo Central), but not church planting in other regions of the West Coast such as: Kombo South, Kombo East, and FoniBrefit. Moreover, the study included selected pastors and leaders in ECWA and other denominations like the: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, but not Pastors and leaders of these churches in the other Regions of The Gambia such as: Lower River Division, Upper River Division, Central River Division, and St. Mary's Division, Banjul.

I also worked with the Mandinka, Jola and Manjangos, who are the predominant ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia but not the Wolof, Fula, Serehule, Serre, Balanta, and the Aku, who were predominantly located in other regions of The Gambia. Moreover, the research participants recruited for this study were predominantly male pastors within the ages of twenty five to sixty and not more of females. In fact, only two females within the ages twenty five and thirty were recruited for this study. Finally, this project was not primarily focused on the methods of the spread of Islam in the Gambia, but the best practices of church planting in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

This project consulted biblical, theological, and sociological literatures which gave meaningful insights into the various methods and challenges of church planting among the Muslims in a given community. Some of the most outstanding people addressing the puzzling issue I have chosen to explore in this project were: Greg Livingstone, David J. Hesselgrave, Michael Green, Stuart Murray, Russ Morgan, Charles H Kraft, and Donald M. McCurry.

Outstanding among the common themes addressed by these various authors are: contextualization, discipleship, leadership development, communication, and the value of relationship building. A brief look at these various themes shed light on my topic under review and therefore deepened my understanding on this project. For instance, the theme of contextualization of the Gospel was demonstrated by Jesus (John 1:14; John 20:21; Gal.4:4-5); Paul (1Cor.9:20-21; Acts.16:1-3; Acts.21:23; 1Cor.10:23-33), and the

Apostles at the Jerusalem Council (Acts. 15:19-35). Each of these people translated the gospel in light of the cultural context of their audiences whose world views were similar to the Muslims.

The gospel subsequently crossed over various cultural barriers with the primary objective of getting lives transformed through the unchanging message of salvation. The art of communication is critical in church planting in a Muslim context; subsequently, the gospel is shared through a cultural barrier which demands an effective mode of bringing home the message that could result in the establishment of a transformed community in Christ. In the course of church planting, the gospel should not only be contextualized, but it also demands the need for discipling the converts; in order for them to become Spirit-filled transformed followers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim.2:2; Matt.4:18-22; Luke 6:13; John 1:42-43).

The need for mentorship and capacity building is a gateway to raising elders and pastors who will shepherd the flock entrusted into their hands. Moreover, the need to build cordial relationships in church planting creates the conducive atmosphere of sharing the gospel among the unreached people groups. Closely related to the theme of relationship is the manifestation of love in the lives of the carriers of the unchanging message of Jesus Christ. This can be demonstrated through meeting the felt needs of the Muslims in a given geographical setting. On the whole, a closer study of my topic added a new dimension of church planting methods in a Muslim majority nation than what is reflected in some of the literatures engaged with in the course of this research.

### **Research Methodology**

The method used in this project was qualitative in nature and not quantitative. This enabled the subjects of the study to tell their individual stories which gave me an insight into their experiences and knowledge, on the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context. I used a pre-intervention approach to specifically identify the best practices of church planting by ECWA and other churches that would result in the planting of healthy indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. With the use of a semi-structured interviews and focus groups, I then collected data from twenty nine participants primarily, pastors and Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) from churches of different denominational backgrounds. Data collected from the respondents was then analyzed which helped me discover the findings to this project.

The need to answer my three research questions was critical to this qualitative study. In the light of this, I intentionally ensured that the items designed and administered in both semi-structured interviews and focus groups aligned with the purpose statement and research questions guiding this study. Moreover, in order to ensure the reliability and validity of responses received from these respondents, the generated data was analyzed through constant comparison analysis by Juliet Cobin and Anselm Strauss. The findings from the analyzed data, coupled with the Literature Review of this project, served as the framework for the results of this project, and the extent to which these findings could be replicated in another geographical location.

## **Type of Research**

The Research Design used for this project was a Qualitative, Pre-intervention study. The selection of this type of study enabled me to get from the respondents a detailed description of the reason(s) why indigenous churches were hardly planted in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast region of The Gambia, in spite of how long Christianity had been introduced in the subject population of this study. I investigated the specific problem characteristic of church planting in the WCR of The Gambia. The data collected from the respondents, served as an eye opener for me to identify the best practices of church planting in that Muslim majority context and ultimately make suggestions/recommendations for pastors/church planters. Therefore, the research lens used to address this project was qualitative method. This created room for an in-depth and detailed enquiry of the problem I investigated for this study. Moreover, the generated data for this qualitative study were facilitated through a Semi-structured interview and Focus Group Study. The use of these instruments created a platform for me to probe responses from the interviewees, to help shed light on the responses given to the items administered in this project.

## **Participants**

In the course of administering the appropriate instruments to collect data for this project, I engaged with twenty nine participants from the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Among them, twenty seven of the participants were pastors, while two were lay people. Moreover, only two of the participants were females and the rest were males. Except for two of the participants who were single, the rest of the subjects were married. The ages of the respondents ranged from twenty five to sixty



as evident in figure 4:2. In light of this, ten pastors were recruited from the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), while nineteen pastors/laities were selected from other churches; among whom six of them were Muslim background believers (MBBs) as shown in figure4:1 of this study. This was therefore suggestive of the fact that, participants were selected from diverse denominational backgrounds. Most of the participants were selected from, the Divisional headquarters Brikama, and not the rural areas.

The participants were chosen based on the following grounds. Firstly, they came from various denominational backgrounds and gave opportunity for me to get a broad perspective of church planting among the targeted population of this study. Secondly, the wealth of experience of the participants in church planting among Muslims was a key factor that influenced me to select the recruited participants for this project. Thirdly, Muslim background believers were intentionally selected to get an idea of the world view of the Muslim adherents, prior to their conversion experience in the Christian faith. Fourthly, most of the participants were selected from the Divisional headquarters Brikama, and not the rural areas like-Siffoe, Gunjur, Darisalami, and Marakissa, due to the accessibility of the participants in Brikama, and the planting of more churches in the administrative headquarters of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **Instrumentation**

I designed and administered open ended questionnaires for a semi-structured interview protocol and focus group study (see Appendixes A, B, and C). I used these two instruments to measure the knowledge of pastors from ECWA and other churches on the methods, barriers, and best practices of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim

majority context of the WCR of The Gambia. The respective designed questions on this qualitative study enabled me to generate data from the respondents both in the pre-test and post-test of this study. The ten items administered through a semi-structured interview (see Appendix A) enabled me to collect data from the respondents on the basis of mutual agreements on location and time for conducting of interview. These designed questions served as the primary means of data collection from the ten ECWA pastors and one pastor each from five other churches. Five questions were administered through a focus group study conducted among eight pastors from various church backgrounds (see Appendix B), and six items were administered through another focus group study among MBBs (see Appendix C). These made it possible for me to receive different responses from the selected interviewees on the given questions.

The three research questions that guided this study aligned with these specific instruments (Semi-structured interview/Focus Group study) which gave an insight to me on the generated data for this project. Subsequently, data collected also aligned with the research questions for this study. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings to this study, multiple instruments were therefore used to address the research questions designed for this qualitative project. Both a semi structured interview protocol and a focus group study were used to address RQ1- RQ3 of this study. For example, the total number of twenty one interview questions (see Appendixes A, B and C), administered by me, helped the respondents to shed light on each of the research questions. Specifically, seven questions based on the methods of planting indigenous churches aligned with RQ1 (see Appendixes a, b and c, while six questions based on the barriers of church planting among Muslims (see. Appendixes a, b and c) aligned with

RQ2. Finally, eight questions, reflecting on best practices of church planting in the Muslim context of WCR, aligned with RQ3.

### **Data Collection**

Generating the relevant data was critical to this qualitative study. I collected data within a period of three months. This time frame afforded me the possibility of communicating with the different heads of churches and mission bodies in order to gain their permission/approval for the conduct of interviews/focus groups among the recommended participants. With the assurance of confidentiality coupled with ethical consideration by me, a total of twenty nine participants comprised of pastors/laities from ECWA and other churches, who had been engaged in church planting among Muslims in my ministry context, were eventually recruited for this study. I conducted a semi structured interview with ten of the pastors of ECWA. Each of them responded to ten items designed by me. Data collected from each research participant was recorded on audio tape and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Having engaged these recruited participants for a month, I used the same instrument to administer the same set of questions among five clergy, with one each, from various denominational backgrounds. Data from interviewees were collected accordingly within a period of two weeks, as described in this study. After the collection of data through a semi structured interview for those fifteen pastors, I conducted a focus group study with eight pastors, from various denominational backgrounds. This was followed by another focus groups with six Muslim background believers (MBBs) in the targeted population of this study. The qualitative data received from the interviewees were of invaluable help towards my project. This is evident from the fact that, each of the items administered for the semi-

structured interviews and focus groups (see Appendixes A, B and C), actually aligned with both the purpose statement and research questions which guided this project. In the light of the fact that, the project was focused on identifying the best practices of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the WCR, twenty one questions were designed as evident in: i. Appendix A, with ten items on semi structured interviews, ii. Appendix B, with five items on focus groups and iii. Appendix C, six items on another set of focus groups. All of the interview items reflected both the purpose statement and three research questions, which focused on the methods (RQ1), barriers (RQ2), and best practices (RQ3) of church planting in the subject population.

### **Data Analysis**

The research design used for this project was a pre-intervention. The study was primarily focused on identifying the best practices of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the WCR of The Gambia, against the background that, Christianity had penetrated the subject population for over 500 years. The generated data for this qualitative study was secured through a semi-structured interview protocol with pastors from ECWA and other churches, and then two sets of focus group study among pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds. Data collected and analysed by me provided the framework for discovering the major findings of this study as indicated in Chapter four, followed by descriptions of these findings and recommendations in Chapter five.

The transcribed data from the two instruments, namely the semi structured interview and focus group study, were analysed through the use of two different approaches: a combination of Constant Comparison Analysis by Corbin and Strauss, and

then Framework Analysis by Ritchie and Spencer. In spite of some overlap in the principles expressed by these different statistical analyses, Moschella, Mary Clark's suggestion of engaging with the transcript data through 'literal reading,' 'interpretive reading' and 'reflexive reading' (172-173), proved helpful to me in discovering major patterns, themes, and categories which cut across the analysed data in both semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The themes and patterns which emerged after two weeks of engagement with the transcript data from both statistical analyses subsequently reflected on the purpose statement and research questions guiding this qualitative study. This is evident from the fact that, the interview items in Appendixes A, B, and C were reflective of the methods, barriers and best practices of church planting in the subject population.

### **Generalizability**

The study was focused primarily on the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context by pastors/laities from ECWA and other churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia and not pastors/laities from the remaining five Regions of The Gambia, namely: North Bank Division, Upper River Division, Lower River Division, Central River Division and Kombo St. Mary/Banjul. In the light of this, some of the findings to this qualitative study are not applicable to other divisions outside the scope of this study Secondly, in the light of the demography and cultural diversities of ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, some of the findings are also only applicable to the subject population and not the other districts/towns in the West Coast Region, not discussed in this study. Thirdly, in spite of the fact that the study was focused on pastors from ECWA Churches and selected pastors from other denominations, some of

the major findings to this study are applicable to pastors in other Divisions/Regions/Districts of The Gambia.

The findings in this project are not only trustworthy as indicated in this work, they are also significant. This is evident from the fact that, they are actually consistent with the purpose of the project and will definitely impact the practice of ministry in a Muslim majority context. For example, the finding surrounding misconceptions between Muslims and Christians underscored the need for reaching Muslims as an integral part of God's redemptive plan for humanity (Luke 19:10). This therefore suggests the need for a paradigm shift in the mind set of church planters in their attitude towards the unreached Muslim Group. Moreover, other major findings like contextualization, relationship building, and discipleship which surfaced in this study are quite relevant to the planting of indigenous churches in a pluralistic and Muslim majority context.

### **Project Overview**

Chapter 2 explores the Literature Review of the study, by addressing the biblical and theological dimensions of the project. It also takes a critical look at the views and perceptions of other scholars/missiologists in the light of the major themes and sub themes relevant to the purpose and research questions of this project. Chapter 3 outlines the various methods I took to investigate the research questions with the objective of discovering the reliability and validity of the designed instruments, in the light of the purpose statement and research questions for the project. Chapter 4 gives a vivid analysis of the findings from the data collected through the designed instruments. Chapter 5 summarizes and interprets the major findings, implications and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

This study focused on addressing the problem of church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, against the background that, even though Christianity had reached the subject population for over five hundred years, nevertheless, planting of indigenous churches is still on the low side. This is evident by the fact that, only eight percent of the subject populations are Muslims. In light of this, the need to identify the best practices of church planting, which would give birth to the establishment of indigenous churches in the targeted population of this study, is key. Given this problem associated with church planting among the subject population, I therefore looked at, what other schools of thoughts and Missiologists have said about church planting in a Muslim context vis- a –vis the generated data from the research methodology designed for this qualitative project.

This chapter sheds light on the biblical and theological foundations of church planting as the framework for my dissertation. I focus on the meaning and dimensions of church planting both in the Old and New Testaments which give the contemporary readers a wider scope in their understanding of church planting, thereby eliminating the traditional view of church planting as being limited to the New Testament. I mention the key biblical and theological themes that constituted the bases of church planting in the targeted population of this study. I also discuss the major research themes and sub-themes in the light of the problem and purpose statement indicated in this work, followed by a critical analysis of scholarly articles, books, and dissertations which underscored these

major themes identified in this project. Finally, I provide a literature summary in which I take an objective look at the key arguments surrounding the themes through the lens of new perspectives of church planting that are culturally relevant for a transformed community in my ministry context.

## **Biblical Foundations**

### **Background Information on Biblical Foundations**

In spite of the fact that the expression church planting is not explicit in the Bible, one cannot isolate the term church planting from the Scriptures. It is however implicit as suggested in this study. The biblical foundation of this study is therefore examined in the light of both the OT and NT. A closer look at the purpose statement of this study suggests the need to have a vivid understanding on the biblical foundations of church planting. It is however ironical that the term church planting is not explicit in the Bible. What is explicit is the command for disciple making. In spite of the absence of the expression church planting in the Bible, churches are apparently planted as disciples are made. This implies that churches are born in the context of discipleship. **Payne, J D** vividly puts it in Chapter 12 of his text “There is no direct command to plant churches for it is in the process of evangelizing, baptizing and teaching that local churches are planted” (276).

In the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, Ted Esler also vividly articulates this fact saying, “the church happens in the context of discipleship. Healthy disciples produce healthy churches” (68). A vivid understanding of the biblical foundation of the church is vital in opening our understanding on the theological framework of the church. Payne sheds light on this truth saying, “The scriptures are our source of guidance for doctrine and practice. Church planters who fail to base their



theological framework on the Bible tread on the shifting sands of contemporary fads, trends and whims” (286). He also states that, “Biblical church planting derives principles primarily from the scriptures...” (296). This Biblical justification of church planting could therefore be found both in the Old and the New Testament as examined in this study.

### **Church Planting Definition in the Light of the OT and NT**

One cannot talk about church planting in the Old and New Testament without getting a vivid insight on what the church is, in the context of both the OT and NT. A vivid understanding of what the church is in both Testaments illuminates the understanding of the contemporary reader on the concept of the church in the Holy Bible. The etymology of the word church, in the world of the NT, could be looked at from the Greek word *ekklesia*. According to Luis Bush, *ekklesia* comes from the word *ek* which means ‘out’ and the verb *kaleo* which means ‘to call’. Consequently, the word *ekklesia* means ‘the called-out ones’ (85). This concept of the church as the called-out ones is expressed in the NT in various forms such as- the ‘Body of Christ,’ the ‘Temple of God,’ a ‘spiritual house,’ ‘Mount Zion,’ the ‘General Assembly,’ the ‘Church of the first born,’ the ‘Bride of Christ,’ the ‘Holy City,’ and the ‘New Jerusalem.’ These various forms of expressions of the church in the NT vividly underscores the Greek meaning of the word ‘church’ as indicated in this study. Bush further sheds light on this fact saying, “in almost all of Apostle Paul’s greetings in the Epistles to the churches, he describes the church as the ‘saints’ in Jesus Christ by calling of God (Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:2; Eph. 1;1; Phil. 1:1; Rom.16:15; 2 Cor. 13:12)...therefore, from the etymology of the word *ekklesia* as supported by the term ‘saints’, the church consists of those who have been called out of

the world by God and separated as a distinct fellowship of those who profess faith in Christ”( 86). This is suggestive of the need for believers in the contemporary period to make a difference in these communities.

All of the names expressive of the church in the New Testament reflect the spiritual and organic dimension of the church. Similarly, the concept of the church in the Old Testament had its root meaning from Qahal, a Hebrew term, referring to an assembly of congregation, in the Old Testament. It could be seen that, the uses of the respective Greek and Hebrew terms- ‘ekklesia’ and ‘Qahal,’- depict a striking similarity. Bush points out this fact saying, “The Greek term ekklesia is always used to translate some form of the Hebrew word Qahal which the lexicon defines as ‘an assembly, congregation or convocation’ (Gen. 49:6, Prov.5:15; Num. 22:4; Jer. 31:8; Deut.5: 19; Mic.2:5; Ezz.10:2).On the basis of the Septuagint usage, as in classical Greek, ekklesia means ‘an assembly’ .However, “in some cases, the meaning of assembly can be attributed to ekklesia in the New Testament” (86). (Acts 7:38; Acts 19:32, 39, 41). This striking similarity in meaning of the Greek and Hebrew words- ekklesia and Qahal, point out the concept of the ‘church’ as the ‘called out ones’ as evident in both the old and the New Testament John S.Hammett drives home this point saying,

In designating themselves ekklesia, the early Christians were taking a word already in use by Greek speaking Jews, to refer to the people of God in the Old Testament, and thus making a claim to some degree of historical connection to that earlier people; they were also using a word that reinforced the idea that the church is made up of those summoned or called by God. (27)

In spite of the similarity in the use of the Hebrew word qahal and the Greek word ekklesia as explained in this study, it is apparent that there is some variety in the New Testament usage of ekklesia. It is against this background that Hammett says, “the term is found in the New Testament 114 times. Of these, three refer to a secular assembly and two refer to the Old Testament people of God. The remaining 109 verses refer to the New Testament church” (28). Out of these 109 verses, only three references to ekklesia are found exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew 16:18; 18:17. Hammett underscores this fact saying, “these are historically and theologically important passages, but they are only two and both seem to look to a future situation. The implication is that the church was not given birth to until after Christ’s earthly ministry” (28).

Having looked at the meaning of the church in the context of both the Old and New Testaments, it is apparent that the church is neither a physical structure nor an organization, but a living organism which is not man’s, but God’s idea. Hammett aptly puts it, “the church comes into being, not by any human initiative, but in response to a divine call...” (27). Nate Krupp too underscores this fact saying:

Whenever the scriptures mention the word church, it never means a building, it never refers to a denomination, and it is never used in referring to an organization, only people. We are the church, we don’t go to the church, we don’t join the church, we don’t have a church, and we are the church. The church is the people Jesus died to save, people who would be in a loving relationship with Him and in loving right relationship with one another. (20)

This concept of the church as indicated by Bush, Hammett and Krupp suggests a paradigm shift in the contemporary world in our approach of church planting to reach the unreached people groups in our communities.

### **Church Planting in the Old Testament**

Many dispensationalists hold on to the view that the church is primarily a New Testament revelation and is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament. This is however a fallacy. The position of this study is that- a vivid revelation of the church could be found in the Old Testament. The Church as a living organism and not an organization, is definitely not a New Testament concept, but the eternal purpose of God decreed even before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:4, 9, 11; 2:10; 3; 11; 2Tim.1:9; Titus 1:2,3). It is ultimately manifested in the New Testament. Kevin J. Conner underscores this fact saying,

The church is therefore a manifestation in time of an eternal purpose. Because of God's foreknowledge, He could will and purpose to bring forth the church to His glory (Rom.8:26-30) before Jew or Gentile even existed)...The purpose of God was hidden in the Old Testament (Eph.3:5; Matt.13:17; 1Pet.1:10-12; Rom.16:25-26) but a progressive revelation...manifested in the New Testament Times (Isaiah.28:10-14; Heb.1:1). (15)

Conner also explicitly stated saying, "the New Testament church was both prophesied and typified in the Old Testament times" (37).

## **Predictions of the Church in the Old Testament**

### **The Church Prophesied**

Various references in the Old Testament in respect of the coming of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God and eventually the Church, as the Body of Christ, ultimately found their fulfilment in the New Testament- as the Gentiles embraced the message of salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit through Paul, as an Apostle to the Gentiles and other New Testament writers in obedience to the Great Commission. It is against this background, that Christopher J. H. Wright indicates how the Old Testament provided the foundation of the Great Commission. He argues,

The Great Commission was not something Jesus thought up as an afterthought something for the disciples to be getting on with while He went back to Heaven. It was not just something that rested solely on His own authority as the risen Lord (though, of course, it is fully warranted by that, as Matthew's version makes clear). It was the inevitable outcome of the story as the Scriptures told it- leading up to the Messiah and leading on to mission to the nations. (12)

Below are some Old Testament prophecies of the Gentiles coming into Christ by the Gospel as stated by Conner,

All nations were to be blessed by the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22:18).

All the families of the earth were to be blessed by Abraham's seed (Gen. 26:4).

All kindreds of the nations would worship the Lord (Psalms 22:27-28).

In the last days all nations would flow to the house of God (Isaiah 2:2-3).

The Gentiles would seek the Root of Jesse (Isaiah 1:10).

Many nations would be sprinkled with the blood of Messiah (Isaiah 52:15).

Many nations would be joined to the Lord in that day (Zechariah 2:11).

The name of the Lord will be great among the Gentiles (Malachi 1:11). (37)

A closer study of these Old Testament prophecies, in respect of the Gentiles in the redemptive plan of God, show that- the word ‘church’ was never used in the Old Testament. However, I am of the opinion that the various prophecies in the light of the Gentiles coming into God’s kingdom point to the Church as God’s agent of the kingdom being fulfilled in the New Testament. Against this background that Conner argues, saying,

When we see the Gentiles coming into the church through Christ, then we understand Old Testament Prophecy of blessing on the gentiles. Although the word Church is not used in the Old Testament specifically (though Qahal- Congregation and Assembly is), yet the word Gentiles is used. Whenever these references speak of Gentiles coming into blessing with the true Israel of God that is the Old Testament way of speaking of the New Testament Church. It is in this way the church was prophesied of in the Old Testament by the Prophets (38).

### **The Church Typified**

An in-depth study of the Scriptures show that the Old Testament vividly prophesied the coming of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. However, what was unknown to them was the revelation that the Church would be the Body of Christ made up of both Jew and Gentile (Eph.3:1-6). In spite of the fact that the concept of the Church was a mystery to them, nevertheless it was both prophesied and typified. This is evident from some of the writings of Paul (Rom.16; 25, 26; 1Cor.10:6, 11). Conner asserts, “the

Apostles realized that many things in the New Testament, were Old Testament types and symbols of the church, thereby foreshadowing the New Testament Church” (38).

When the Apostles had a full revelation of the dynamics of the Church in the first century, they came to an understanding that many of the references to the Gentiles in the Old Testament were symbols of the church which subsequently foreshadowed the New Testament church. This implies that, prophets like- Moses, Isaiah, Joel, Enoch, Zachariah, and Malachi ministered not only to their generation but to ours too (Heb.1:1, 2). The writings of these various Old Testament Prophets immensely shed light on various symbols and types of the church that are substantiated by the New Testament writers. The following are a few examples found in the Scriptures: The Tabernacle in the Wilderness as God’s Dwelling: Exodus 25-40, Ephesian. 2; The flock of God: Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel. 34, John.10, and the Golden candlestick: Exodus. 25:31-40, Revelation.1-3.

### **Church Planting in the New Testament**

This work has pointed out various dynamics of church planting in the Old Testament which foreshadowed church planting in the New Testament as a central part of God’s mission to form a new people of God (Eph.1:13-14; 1Pet.2:4-10). As a missionary God, he reveals his eternal redemptive plan for mankind through Jesus’ mission on earth which culminated in the Great Commission (Matt.28:18-20). Since church planting is based on the Biblical Mission of God, the Great Commission, which is an imperative from Jesus Christ, serves as a major drive for the planting of churches both in the apostolic era and the twenty- first century.

This biblical justification for church planting is generally based on Matthew 28: 18-20 as stated, “All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore,

go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Other passages associated with the Great Commission are: Luke 24:45-47; John 20:21-23 and Acts 1:8. In all these passages, the emphasis is placed on ‘making disciples of all nations’. Payne brings home this fact saying,

The apostolic Church was given the mandate to bear witness to Christ and His Resurrection by making disciples of all nations. Though a disciple is made whenever a person places faith in Christ for salvation, discipling is a lifelong process. The best context for both making disciples and discipling—which includes baptism and teaching obedience is the local community of disciples (i.e., the church). (330)

This point of view is similarly maintained by Donald A. McGavran, who is considered the father of the modern Church Growth Movement. In the book which he co-authored with Arthur F. Glasser, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*, McGavran defines “mission” as:

Carrying the gospel across cultural boundaries to those who owe no allegiance to Jesus Christ, encouraging them to accept Him as Lord and Savior and to become responsible members of His Church, working, as the Holy Spirit leads, at both evangelism and justice, at making God’s will done on earth as it is done in heaven. (26)



In the light of fulfilling this mission of God as vividly noted by Payne and McGavran, I endeavoured to take a closer look at some biblical principles of church planting in the New Testament with specific focus on Paul as an Apostle to the Gentiles.

### **Models of Church Planting in the New Testament**

This section takes a brief look at the models of church planting by the Apostle Paul, the pioneer church planter in the first century, such as- church planting in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome. The principles learnt on church planting in this apostolic era- are still relevant to church planting in a contemporary and pluralistic society as evident in the course of this work.

#### **Church Planting in Jerusalem**

The New Testament church began with one hundred and twenty disciples (Acts 1:15). On the day of Pentecost, three thousand people were added to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41, 42). Soon the membership of the Jerusalem church increased to five thousand (Acts 4:4). This ultimately led to multitudes of men and women being added (5:14), while the number of disciples multiplied accordingly (Acts 6:1, 7)- as the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria strengthened and increased in number daily (Acts 9:31, 16:5, 21:20).

The above pattern of growth in the Early Church vividly demonstrates the fact that, the church grew in number by adding believers to the existing church not only in obedience to the Great Commission, but as people who have had an encounter with Jesus Christ and were therefore mission focused. Henry T. Blackaby, who co-authored with Avery T. Willis on the topic - “On Mission with God” aptly argues, “to be related to Christ, is to be on Mission with Him. You cannot be in relationship with Jesus and not be

on Mission” (77). David J Bosch vividly puts it in his article: ‘Witness to the World’, “Mission in the New Testament is more than a matter of obeying a command. It is rather the result of an encounter with Christ”(81). This subsequently accounts for the multiplication of churches in Jerusalem in the Early Church history. Cairn vividly and aptly puts it:

It is interesting that the first church of Christianity was planted in the center of the place where there was the most violent struggle concerning Christ. However, this is what happened. The church in Jerusalem took the leading position in the community of churches in the days of early Christianity from A.D. 30 to A.D. 44. It is against this background that, the Jerusalem church became the mother church of Christianity and the first bishop of the church was James, who was the brother of the Lord. He built the Jerusalem church until he was martyred in A.D. 44. However, the strongest mental supporter of the church was still Peter. (74)

This sporadic growth and multiplication of churches as evident in the Apostolic era, suggests to the contemporary readers, the extent to which the missional mandate took pre-eminence in the minds of the Apostles, during the first century.

### **Church Planting in Antioch**

While the Jerusalem church was planted around the Apostles following the birth of the church in the upper room on Pentecost day (sActs 1:4-8 cf. 2:1-4), the Antioch church was planted around the laity who were scattered following the persecution that faced the church at Jerusalem after the death of Stephen as the first martyr of the church (Acts11:19). Some men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to

the Hellenists. Then, a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:20-21). Subsequently, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch to make sure that their faith was firm. Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people, and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:22-26). Williston Walker aptly puts it, “the Antioch church seems to be the first ekklesia in which the scattered Jews and the Greeks were gathered together due to persecution” (38). Similarly, Professor Jong Yeol Jang analyzes the missionary dimension of the establishment of the Antioch church by saying, “The Holy Spirit planted the Antioch church to solve the situation because the apostles did not obey the order to evangelize, though they were ordered to achieve this mission. So the missionary order of Jesus was achieved by sending out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries” (71).

### **Church Planting in Ephesus**

The church in Ephesus was planted during the second Missionary Journey of Paul, in AD 50. Upon the completion of his missionary journey in Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth, Paul took leave of the brethren and departed for Syria along with Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 19:18). However, on their arrival in Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquilla to build upon the foundation he had built upon assurance of returning to Ephesus (19-21). He only came back to the church in Ephesus during his third Missionary Journey and stayed there for two years, where he eventually established a discipleship training school at Tyrannus (Acts 19: 10a). This gave birth to the spiritual growth and maturity of his disciples and the subsequent advancement of the gospel both to the Jews and the Greeks in Asia (Acts 19:10b).

Paul's methods of church planting in Ephesus- demonstrate the principles and value of team work (Acts 18:18, 26), follow up (Acts. 18:21), and discipleship (Acts. 19:10a) in order to build up lasting life- transformed disciples in a given community where the church of God is planted. If church planters in the contemporary period are to make an invaluable impact in their ministry context, such principles which formed the framework of Paul's evangelistic methods in Ephesus should form an integral part of church planting strategies in reaching an unreached people group. Though the church of Ephesus later fell away from some of the biblical foundational teachings of Paul (Eph. 5:8) and lost their first love for Christ (Rev. 2:4), nevertheless, this should serve as a wake up call for church planters in the twenty -first century, that the Church, though God's initiative, is not faced without challenges as a living organism (Eph. 6:10-13).

### **Church Planting in Rome**

Rome was the center of the Roman Empire. Christianity became the state religion as early as AD 313, although who established the Roman church is uncertain. The claim made by the Roman Catholic Church that the church was planted by Peter and that he served as Bishop for twenty-five years is contrary to the calling of Peter in serving the Jews and not the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9).

The Gospel was preached in Rome during the Apostolic Age (Acts 2:10) with the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in AD 30- visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism) benefited from the heavenly promise in the upper room in Jerusalem. These visitors were among those who embraced the gospel following Peter's message on Pentecost day.

Subsequently, the Roman church comprised both Jews and Gentiles, but various passages indicate that, there were more Gentiles than Jews in the Roman Church (Rom 1:13, 11:7-19). Many of these Gentiles accepted the gospel following their conversion to Judaism earlier in their life. They were very familiar with the law of the Old Testament and the doctrines in the laws of Judaism (Rom7:4-6).

The church in Rome faced persecutions from various Roman emperors like- Nero (AD64) and Domitian (AD 81-96). This led to martyrdom for many Roman church believers- and the establishment of more churches by believers who were scattered on account of persecution. The persecution faced by the believers in Rome points to the need for churches in the twenty first century to take their prophetic role in their communities seriously by not only praying for the leadership in their nations, but to stand firm in defense of their faith in the face of adversities from ungodly rulers.

### **Biblical images of the church**

The primary means through which the Bible teaches about the church is through diverse metaphors or images which express the dynamic natures of the church in a given context. This work here examines key examples of images of the church in the Scriptures, pointing out the biblical foundation of the church. These are the: People of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of the Spirit.

#### **The People of God**

Hammett says that the Church is addressed as God's Chosen People (Exod.19; 5-6; Deut.4:20; 7:6; Hos.1:10; 2:23, cf. 1Pet.2:9-10; Rom.9:25-26). These images raise the question of the relationship of the church to the Old Testament people of God, Israel (32). This has subsequently led to the views of two schools of thoughts namely, covenant

theology and dispensational theology. The former maintains that there is only one people of God. This is against the background that the New Covenant of grace cuts across the covenant that was established with God's people (Israel) in the Old Testament. This implies that the church in the New Testament is the spiritual Israel or new Israel, while the church in the Old Testament is Israel. On the other hand, "dispensational theology emphasizes the discontinuity between Israel and the church. God works in different ways in different eras or dispensations. Israel is always Israel and never the church" (Hammett 32).

Inasmuch as there are elements of both continuity and discontinuity in respect of Israel and the church, my position is that the people of God in the New Testament are the New Israel. Subsequently, churches in the New Testament are the called-out people in Christ, in fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of calling the people Israel as a nation. This therefore cuts across every form of racial, social, ethnic, or gender differences in Christ as stated by Paul, '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' (Gal.3:28). The Apostle John in the island of Patmos, concludes, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God' (Rev.21:3). The people of God image demonstrates the fact that the church is not a human institution but a divine institution and living organism.

### **The Body of Christ**

The Body image of the church is used to illustrate various dynamics of the church as indicative in the following verses- 1Cor.12:16-17, 14-20, 27; Rom.12:4-5, cf. Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23, 29-30; Col.1:18, 24, 2:19.

The body images in Corinthians and Romans primarily illustrate the relationships between members in a given local church, such as ‘unity in the body,’ ‘unity and diversity within the body,’ and ‘mutuality and love among the members’ (Hammett-40). This aspect of unity is vividly demonstrated in the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. On the contrary, the body images in Ephesians and Colossians emphasize primarily the universality of the church and the relationship of Jesus Christ as the head of the body of Christ respectively. Five times Paul echoed the universality of the church as seen in- Eph.1:22-23, 5:23, 29-30; Col.1:18, 24. Similarly, five times he echoes the role of Christ as the head of the body (Eph.1:22, 4:15, 5:23; Col.1:18; 2:19)- (Hammett 41).

### **The Temple of the Spirit**

This image of the church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit (2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:21)- is implied from Jesus’ declaration to Peter in Matthew 16:18: ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.’ The church in this context is not Peter (petros), on which the church is built; neither is it an allusion to the papacy of the church as claimed by many Catholics. The church is therefore not a material but a spiritual house built of lively stones (1Peter 2:5-9) and it is built as the habitation of God by the Spirit (Eph.2:20-22). This suggests the reason Paul describes the church as the Temple of God

(2 Cor.6; 16).This implies that God indwells his people through the Holy Spirit who lives in them (Hammett 42).

Conner sheds light on this point saying, “Just as the Tabernacle of Moses , the Temple of Solomon was built by revelation of the Spirit upon the people; so Christ is building His Church...”(43).

The image of the church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit has two implications. Firstly, just as the physical temple in the Old Testament was a place where God was worshipped, similarly the church, being the Temple of the Holy Spirit, should be people of worship (Hammett 46). Secondly, it illustrates the vital need for intimate relationship between God and his people. This is evident from the fact that the Temple of God in the OT- was not only designed for worship, but a place where God meets with his people. On the same note, God indwells among his people (John1:14) through the Holy Spirit (1Cor.6:11) who sanctifies us and makes us fit to enter into a relationship with God (Hammett 46-47).

In summary, these various elements of biblical images of the church, should serve as sign posts to pastors and heads of missions in putting aside their denominational differences, in order to advance the kingdom of God in their respective ministry contexts. It should also serve as a wake-up call to church planters that- the ultimate authoritative head of the church is Jesus Christ (Matt.16:18) - and not man. This implies that the individualistic tendencies characteristic of some church planters or heads of churches/missions do not biblically reflect God’s missional agenda for the church in the twenty first century. The element of unity in diversity as indicated in the biblical images



of the church is therefore suggestive of the need for team-building among pastors- if they are to build a healthy and thriving church in our contemporary and pluralistic society.

### **Theological Foundations**

The traditional view of church planting has been attributed to either an increase in church attendance by believers or the putting up of expensive buildings in the name of church planting. This is however a limited dimension of looking at Church Planting. This is evident from the fact that the Church is not about attendance or how attractive the building is; on the contrary, the Church is a living organism. Calvin Miller drives home this point saying, “upto April 2, 1739 Wesley had never preached the Gospel outside a church building or a society meeting. By taking the step of Preaching the Gospel outside a church building, Wesley returned Preaching to where it belongs, to the Market place” (14). The theological foundations of this study are centered around three theological issues namely: Misseo Deo (Mission of God), Incarnation, and the kingdom of God. These theological themes were looked at based on the relationship between theology and methods which are critical for the church as the primary agent of God’s Mission. Mention was made on how these theological themes were critical to this project.

### **Theology and Methods of Church Planting**

The need for a theological framework for church planting is very vital in the planting of a church in a given ministry context. This is evident from the fact that, generally speaking, our theology of church planting shapes the method and model of churches planted both in the first century and in the contemporary period. This supports the statement that, ‘proper theology’ gives birth to ‘proper methods’. Ironically, in the

Evangelical world, there is much emphasis on the ‘how’ of church planting (strategy, methods), rather than the ‘why’. Richard Yates Hibbert maintains that, “The biblical and theological foundations for the planting of churches have generally been assumed rather than explicitly articulated.”(4) Murray sheds light on this fact saying:

All church planters operate within theological frameworks, but often these are assumed rather than articulated, and adopted uncritically rather than as a result of reflection...An inadequate theological basis will not necessarily hinder short-term growth or result in widespread heresy among newly planted churches. But it will limit the long-term impact of church planting, and may result in dangerous distortions of the way in which the Mission of the church is understood. (81)

The question, *why plant a church?* is evidently an imperative theological one, which appears to be less critically addressed than how to plant a church. Against the backdrop of the biblical foundations of church planting which previously have been addressed in this work, the former is a question that has theological affirmations with practical implications for ministry. Hammett argues, “since the church is those called out by God- ‘called to be God’s people,’ ‘Christ’s body,’ and the ‘Spirit’s temple’...it is primarily meant to please God. As ‘God’s Assembly,’ it is a purposeful Assembly of fulfilling the Mission of God and not just free to organize themselves anyhow” (67-68).

Against this background that, I took a close look at three theological lenses that form the framework of church planting and their implications for ministry in the Muslim majority nation of The Gambia. These theological lenses are: *Missio Dei*, Incarnation and the kingdom of God.

## **Missio Dei (The Mission of God)**

### **Meaning of Missio Dei**

The expression *Missio Dei* is a Latin phrase meaning, *the Mission of God*. This is suggestive of the fact that, God is a missionary God. However, many scholars have expressed their views on this term in diverse ways. Murray maintains that- *Missio Dei* is used “to express the conviction that mission is not the invention, responsibility or programme of human beings, but flows from the character and purposes of God.” (31). Wright however, is of the opinion that, the mission of God is “summed up in the words ‘God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year,’ as generations come and go.” (63).

### **The Church and the Missio Dei**

These various views on the dynamics of the term *Missio Dei*, show that the church should be an integral part of *Missio Dei*. Payne emphatically puts it, “as church planters carry the Gospel into the kingdom of darkness and people become citizens of the kingdom of light, local churches are birthed and continue the Mission of God” (314).

Robert E. Webber concurs, ‘the church is the habitation of God’s dwelling in the world, the instrument of God’s voice to witness to God’s mission for the world’ (155). Murray argues “Church planting is not an end in itself, because the church is an agent of God’s mission” (410). Bosch sheds light on the views of Webber and Murray in his article, ‘Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission’, “God’s activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate.” (391). In the light of the views of these various theological scholars, the church apparently is the primary vehicle through which God achieves his

global purposes for the lost world. This could best be actualized through mission, which is the main reason for the existence of the church. Therefore, this study is focused on identifying the best practices of church planting among the Muslims, in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, in fulfilment of God's eternal redemptive plan for humanity.

### **Neglect of the *Missio Dei***

Ironically, that the primary purpose for which the church exists as argued by Emil Bruner in Murray's book is that, 'the church exists by Mission as fire exists by burning' (qtd. in Murray 602). Sadly, some churches in my ministry context are focused on building empires around them by focusing on structures and attendance in a given local church. This in my view is not a true reflection of church planting or the mission of God as pointed out in this study. In the same text, Bosch contends "the church had in a sense ceased to point to God or to the future, instead it was pointing to itself" (qtd. in Murray 332).

### **Dimensions of the *Missio Dei***

The fact that *missio Dei* could be relegated to the background by the church draws our attention to the key fact that God has been on mission throughout history, with the ultimate purpose of fulfilling his eternal redemptive plan for humanity. Against this back ground, Wright states four major dimension of the *Missio Dei*.

#### **Humanity with a Mission**

Wright maintains that, the first major dimension is found in Gen.1:28 when humanity was invited into God's plan to participate in God's blessing by being fruitful and multiplying, by filling and subduing God's earth, and ruling over God's creation.

Thus, the mission of humanity flows from the “creative purpose of God himself,” is the mission dei (65).

### **Israel with a Mission**

Israel’s entry into the missio Dei begins with the call of patriarch Abraham in Genesis 12. This could be found against the backdrop of humanity’s rebellion and sin in Genesis 3-11. God promises his blessing to a race, so that they can actively participate in his mission and thereby bless the rest of humanity on his behalf, for his name’s sake.

### **Jesus with a Mission**

In Jesus, the Missio Dei reached its “climax,” (Wright, 66). His identity as the ‘Servant figure’ (Isa. 42:1), the ‘Davidic Messianic King’ (Ps. 2:7) are ‘energized with a sense of Mission’ (65). This was affirmed by Jesus himself (John. 5:30; 6:38; 12:50). As Wright vividly puts it “God’s Mission determined His Mission” (66).

### **The Church with a Mission**

Dimension four is found in the Church’s missional mandate in Lk. 24:45-47 cf. Matthew 28:18-20. These verses clearly echo the role of the church as a witness and vehicle in carrying out the mission of God. This therefore signals God’s call to Israel in (Isaiah 43:10-12; 46:6b) where they were entrusted, but failed, to serve as a witness to the Gentile nations about Yahweh, the true and living God. All of these dimensions of Mission articulated by Wright, point to the fact that church planting in a Muslim context postmodern world is a non-negotiable issue. This therefore underscores the significance of this study in my targeted population.

## **Implications of the Missio Dei**

### **Holistic Ministry**

As churches engage in fulfilling God's mission, this calls for the need to look beyond the planting of churches in their ministry context, to the meeting of fundamental felt needs in that community. Murray asserts, "Missio Dei should not be limited only to Evangelism and church growth, to the neglect of other aspects (justice, peace in society, concern for the environment, and engagement with culture) ...planting more churches with limited missiological understanding is not a helpful development" (418). His perspective about the mission of God opens the mind of the contemporary readers to the need of putting aside the dichotomy between the sacred and secular as they engage in the planting of churches. If pastors of ECWA and other churches are to make lasting life-transforming impact in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, this suggests doing away with a dualistic world view of church planting by not only focusing on the planting of churches, but addressing social issues like- digging water wells, establishing clinics/health centers and schools.

### **Partnership**

Throughout history, God has been on mission in partnership with His people in order to achieve his purposes. Church planting in the contemporary period should not be centered on individualistic tendencies if we are to establish God's kingdom in an ever-changing world. Murray claims, 'setting church planting in the context of Missio Dei would provide theological underpinning for the practice of team ministry embodied in many church planting initiatives' (436). Keith McCrory concurs saying "the Missio Dei fosters mutual trust and support amongst local clergy as they together seek to identify and

cooperate with what God is doing in their midst” (50). The views of Murray and McCrory suggest the need for the leadership of ECWA and other churches, to partner with mission agencies like- Great Commission and WEC mission, and alongside mainline churches such as the: Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Methodists who have made some positive inroads in church planting among the Muslims in The Gambia.

### **Incarnation**

Incarnation entails God identifying himself with humanity, through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, in order to achieve his eternal purpose of reconciling the world to himself. Subsequently, Jesus though fully God and fully man dwelled among his creation in the pages of history (Gal.4:4; Jn. 1:14). This enabled God to fulfill his mission of establishing his eternal kingdom in the midst of the people.

Against this background that Payne asserts, “we must view church planting in the light of an incarnational approach to missions that is, an approach to Missions that involves living among the people and serving them. The early church used this contextualized paradigm for its mission activity” (319). Dean Flemming asserts that, the incarnation is a “key paradigm” for contextualized mission(20). Louis J. Luzbetak concurs with Flemming’s view , saying “mission consists in incarnating Christ in the given time and place, allowing him to be reborn in the given lifeway” (133). These various views about the incarnation echo the fact that, incarnation is an integral part of mission and subsequently has theological implications for church planting as pointed out in this study.

## **Implications of Incarnation**

In order for God to actualize his redemptive purpose for mankind, Jesus actually lived and preached the gospel in the context of the Jewish people. Charles L. Chaney underscores this fact saying, “the incarnation life and ministry of Jesus Christ as recorded in the NT provides us with the supreme example of biblical contextualization”(133). This entailed love, patient, and meekness by Jesus Christ, in order to identify himself with the people. Similarly, church planters in the contemporary period have to contextualize the gospel in order to effectively communicate it. In the light of this, Pastors of ECWA and other churches have to enter the cultural world of the Muslims in the West Coast Region of the Gambia in order to plant indigenous churches in their ministry context. Patrick O. Cate asserts, “presenting an incarnational witness among Muslims could start with appreciating their worldview and culture and learning their language...” (289). This in my view, calls for profound love, and patience on the part of the leadership of ECWA and other churches, in reaching the Mandinka and Jola from their Islamic background to a life-transformed experience in Jesus Christ; as demonstrated by Paul among the Athenians (Acts.17:16-34).

## **The Kingdom of God**

### **Meaning of the Kingdom of God**

The expression ‘kingdom of God’ has been by different scholars. Ladd says, “The kingdom of God is His kingship, His rule, His authority...not a realm or a people, but it is God’s reign.”(85); he also describes the ‘kingdom of God’ as, “God’s rule or sovereignty.”(60); while Verkuyl views it as the “ultimate goal of the Missio Dei” (168). A common theme that runs across these meanings of the kingdom of God is God’s



rule/reign which is to be established in the hearts of men. No wonder Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God more than any other topic in the New Testament (Marshall 213).

### **The Kingdom of God and Church Planting**

In spite of the fact that, the subject of church planting is an integral part of the Kingdom of God, nevertheless, the latter gives birth to the church not vice versa. Thus the church, being a living organism, is a 'missionary people' (Glasser 225) and 'signpost to the kingdom' (Murray 40). In the light of these points of view, it is apparent that, the church is closely related to the kingdom but is distinct from the Kingdom. Murray sheds light on this truth saying, "the church is a community where as the kingdom is an activity... the kingdom is broader than the church. The kingdom rather than the church defines the scope of God's mission" (509-43).

Ironically, church planters in the contemporary era have emphasized so much the number of churches planted or the size of the congregation, without taking cognizance of the spiritual growth and maturity of the members who have embraced the reign of God in their lives. Payne laments, "I am amazed at the number of church planters who are content with having a large number of churches planted, even if there has been no regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people. Particularly in the West, the church is number hungry. We want to equate the advancement of the gospel and the expansion of the kingdom with the number of new churches started. Church planters must make certain that they have a clear understanding of the kingdom of God and are working towards its advancement, rather than attempting to start a new church with people who are already Kingdom citizens" (324-26). Payne's view is very true of church planting in my ministry context.

### **Implications of the Kingdom of God**

There needs to be a paradigm shift about the kingdom of God in the minds of church planters in the twenty first century. This calls for them to look outside the four walls of their local congregation (church). In my ministry context, this definitely signals a wake-up call for the leadership of ECWA and other churches in their approach to church planting. Ironically, the numerical growth of the churches planted in the West Coast Region of the Gambia comprise of people who were already kingdom citizens from other denominations and also not from an Islamic background. Moreover, the leadership of ECWA, need to address other dynamics of the Kingdom of God, such as the felt needs in their ministry context, which goes beyond church planting. This implies that the church, as a living organism, has a prophetic role to play such as “confronting injustice, championing the course of the poor and marginalized, working with others in rebuilding broken lives... such church planting is a sign of the kingdom.” (Murray 561) Murray then concludes, “Neither church growth nor church planting are ultimate goals. Both are subordinate theologically to the advancement of the kingdom” (559).

### **Definition of Church Planting**

The church planting models are best understood, in the context of getting an insight into what church planting is biblically. The term ‘church planting’ has provoked the minds of missiologists. This is against the background that there is explicitly no scriptural injunction on church planting. Payne asserts, “Believers are not commanded to go into the world and plant churches, but rather make disciples. It is in the process of making disciples (evangelization), that new churches (congregationalization) result” (304).

In order to bring home this truth, C Peter Wagner argues that, ‘the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches’ (qtd. in Payne 208). Even though Wagner’s point of view is subject to scrutiny by other theological scholars who argue that ‘there are many churches being planted with little or no evangelism taking place’ (Payne 302). Livingstone on the other hand vividly puts it, “the term church planting refers to the whole process of evangelizing, discipling, training, and organizing a group of believers to a level of development permitting it to function as a viable church independent of the agent(s) who brought it into being” (73). Payne sheds light on this saying, “Biblical church planting is about using contextualized methods in a strategic manner to reach unbelievers, equipping them as church leaders and send them as evangelists and church planters throughout the world” (30).

### **Implication of Church Planting Definition**

Firstly, in spite of the fact that church planting is not explicitly stated as a biblical mandate, the diverse definitions of church planting as stated by Payne, Wagner, and Livingstone show that- church planting is key to the fulfilment of God’s mission in establishing his Kingdom in the hearts of men, of which Muslims are included. This therefore entails evangelizing, disciple- making, and capacity building which subsequently gives birth to the establishment of indigenous churches. Livingstone in particular echoes three truths characteristic of church planting: “proclaiming the gospel to those who are unsaved; discipling those who accept the gospel and mentoring qualified men to serve as elders” (73). These three elements of Livingstone’s definition of church planting are critical, if a transformed community of faith is to be raised in a Muslim, context as revealed in this project.

Another implication of this definition of church planting is the significance of indigenous churches in a ministry context, which is key to this study. Inasmuch as God's mission has been expressed in various nations through the planting of churches which eventually multiply themselves into the planting of other churches in a given ministry context, the challenge of the hour today is- the need to plant indigenous churches after the church planters (missionaries), had initially planted based on the context they came from. A brief look at what constitutes an indigenous church was vital as I engaged in this research on church planting among Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

When we speak of an indigenous church, we mean the establishment of an autonomous church that naturally exists, grows, and reproduce solely through the labour of national converts in that given ministry context. In other words, the church supports, governs, and propagates itself apart from any dependence or influence from foreign sources.

In Chapter 4 of his text, Murray cites the missiologists- Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn, who developed the three sources of indigenous churches namely: "self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. A self-governing church makes its own decisions... A self-supporting church supports itself financially... and A self-propagating church is able to spread the gospel across its own geographic area and through out the world." (qtd. in Murray 407 – 12) This pattern of church planting was characteristics of churches planted by Paul in the New Testament as affirmed by Hodges saying, "True indigenous church principles are in reality New Testament church principles" (qtd.in Murray 58).

### **Church planting Models in the New Testament**

One of the greatest challenges of church planters is to identify the type of method/ strategy of church planting to implement that would effectively establish the reign of God in the hearts of men in a given ministry context or community. Since church planters have been defined by Livingstone as “the catalytic human agents of the divine process of church development...” (73), and they came from diverse cultural backgrounds, the type of method/strategy of Church planting could vary from place to place or culture to culture at a given point of time. A closer study of church planting in the apostolic period shows that diverse methods of church planting were used by the apostles based on the need of the hour then. Against this background that, Frank Viola points out four methods of church planting which prevailed in the Acts of the apostles. Watchman Nee says, “Never let us regard these early chapters of Acts as inapplicable today. Like the book of Genesis, the Acts of the Apostles reveals the beginnings of God’s ways and what He did sets a pattern for His work always” (qtd.by Viola 26).

These methods of church planting in the first century according to Viola were as follows: Jerusalem model, Antioch model, Ephesus model and Roman model (26-42).

#### **The Jerusalem Model**

This method shows how the twelve Apostles in Jerusalem planted one church through the preaching of Jesus Christ (Acts.3:8-14).The subsequent persecution of the church in Jerusalem gave birth to the planting of various churches in Palestine (Acts 8:1-8; 11:19-21) The apostles ensured the establishment of the newly planted churches but continued to live in Jerusalem (Acts 9:32-11:30), (Viola, 26- 27).

### **The Antioch Model**

This pattern of church planting found in (Acts 13:1-20: 38) was commonly called the ‘fresh seed planting’. It entails the planting of new churches by Paul and his co-workers leaving Jerusalem for South Galatia, Greece, and Asia Minor to exclusively preach the risen Lord in the Person of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:5). In spite of the fact that, they did not permanently stay with the new community of believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, but left them after three to six months, the apostles succeeded in establishing the faith of the new converts on a strong foundation built upon Christ (Matt.7:24ff.; 16:16; 1Cor.3:11; Eph.2:20), on account of the content of their messages (1Cor.3:6-15) (Viola, 27-34). He then contrasts, one with the other “so in the Jerusalem Model the church leaves the apostolic worker, but in the Antioch model the apostolic worker leaves the church” (34).

### **The Ephesian Model**

This pattern of church planting emphasized capacity building of the converts/apprentices of Paul. In the light of this, Paul established a training center in Ephesus, in the Hall of Tyrannus which provided opportunity for eight of Paul’s apprentices to be empowered and equipped with sound biblical teachings running through five hours each day for a period of two years (Acts.19:9-10). Paul later exposed eight of these disciples who came from diverse cultural backgrounds (Galatia, Macedonia, and Asia) to experience cross- cultural communication by sending them all over Asia Minor (Viola, 35-39). He concludes, “in short, Paul’s eight apprentices were the equivalent of the Lord’s twelve Apostles. The twelve brought the Gospel to the Jewish world; Paul’s young co-workers brought it to the Gentile world” (40).

### **The Roman Model**

This method of church planting was commonly called ‘Inverted transplantation.’ The establishment of church planting in Rome (AD 57) has been subject to diverse interpretation by various scholars. A classical subject of controversy, for example is- to whom did Paul address chapter 16 of the Book of Romans- the believers in Ephesus or those in Rome. This work, however, does not address that issue. Luke maintains that, Christians from many different cities who had been in Jerusalem during Pentecost, later returned to Rome to plant a new church. Among those who settled there were people from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Outstanding among them were, Priscilla and Aquila who were very instrumental to the establishment of the church in Ephesus and later Rome (Viola 40-42). He asserts, “Paul’s goal was to plant a multicultural church of Jew and Gentile in the cosmopolitan city of Rome” (42).

These various methods of church planting should signal the need for church planters specifically working in Muslim majority nations, like the Gambia, to be sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit in identifying which method(s) of church planting, could be used in order to effectively reach the unreached people group in a Muslim context. The position of this study is that all of these models of church planting in the apostolic era are relevant to ensure a transformed community in a pluralistic and Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **A critique on John Mark Terry's view on Evangelizing Muslims**

The task of communicating the Gospel among Muslims has attracted the attention of missiologists globally. In as much as the strategy of church planting varies from one cultural context to another, each method does have its strengths and weaknesses. This study now takes a brief look at five key approaches of evangelism as identified by John Mark Terry. This provides a framework in my research on church planting among Muslims in the predominantly Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of the Gambia. In his article: "approaches to the Evangelization of Muslims" Terry listed out five key approaches namely: Confrontational approach, Traditional Evangelical model, Institutional model, Dialogical model and Contextual model (314-16).

#### **Confrontational Approach**

Terry pointed out Missionaries like-Henry Martyn, Karl Pfander, and William St. Clair Tisdall who engaged Muslims in public debate in the nineteenth centuries- with the primary objective of winning them over to the Christian faith. He concluded that- the attempt by these missionaries to win the hearts of Muslim adherents through the intellectual exercise of debating failed to gain converts from the Islamic faith (314). This implied that the hearts of Muslims cannot be won over through arguments. The Qur'an asserts, "O Muslims Do not argue with the 'People of the Book' except in the best of ways... say: "We believe in that which has been sent down to you; Our God and your God is one, and to Him we surrender" (Sura 29:46).



### **Traditional Evangelical Model**

Terry mentioned Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952), commonly called the “Apostle to the Muslims”- as the proponent of this method. He indicated- how Zwemer emphasized the biblical method of leading Muslims to repent of their sins and submitting to the Lordship of Jesus then leaving the mosque to worship in the church. As a prolific writer, Zwemer also engaged in friendship evangelism. Terry however argued that this traditional method though biblical, has been labeled as too western and has not yielded many results in terms of a greater harvest of souls in God’s kingdom (qtd. by Terry 314).

### **The Institutional Model**

This model entails the demonstration of love and compassion as a means of communicating the gospel. This has given birth to the establishment of educational and health institutions by various denominations like the- Catholics, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists with the objective of winning over the hearts of the Muslims. Other missiologists have sent Christian nurses, doctors, and teachers whose life style reflected the love of Christ and eventually won the Muslims over to the Lord. Terry pointed out that, even though this method has yielded positive results, it is faced with challenges in terms of maintenance of the given infrastructures. This subsequently affects the services they do provide (315).

### **Dialogical model**

The pioneer of this method was Temple Gairdner (1878-1928), later developed by Kenneth Cragg. This method is based on establishing intimate relationships with the Muslims, learning their beliefs and eventually communicates the Gospel to them in an

atmosphere of friendliness, with the primary objective of winning them over to the Christian faith (316).

### **Contextualization Model**

Proponents of this method emphasize culturally relevant ways of reaching the Muslims in a given ministry context. They argue that it takes time before Muslim converts desert the mosque as a place of worship. This model of church planting underscores strategic methods of presenting the message of salvation with which the Muslim in that given community could identify with. Key marks of contextualization characteristic of this model are: initial establishment of friendship with Muslim leaders, opinion leaders, and families/relatives in that community. Moreover, adequate time for change to take place must be allowed, while new converts baptism, should not be done immediately but preferably at a later date with other Muslim background believers (316).

One cannot identify a single uniform strategy of church planting for all communities due to the fact that Muslims come from various cultural backgrounds in different parts of the globe. Terry therefore recommends elements of each of the various strategies to be implemented in a given ministry context. The key is determining the extent to which Terry's recommendation is true for my ministry context. My position is that, the confrontational method will definitely not work in ministering among the Mandinka and Jola who are the dominant Muslim ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. An argumentative atmosphere will repel Muslims from embracing the Christian faith, which is viewed as alien to the cultural world of Islam. There is, however, a room to carry the Traditional Evangelical Model, Institutional

Model, Dialogical Model, and Contextual Model in the subject population as shown later in this work.

### **Pre-requisites for Planting Churches among Muslims**

This section addresses the big question of why evangelize the Muslims. The need to evangelize the Muslims is an integral part of God's mission. I will look at this topic later in this study against the background of the major themes relevant to the planting of churches. Evangelism is an integral part of church planting. In fact, one cannot talk about church planting exclusive of evangelism. Payne asserts, "Biblical church planting is evangelism that results in new churches. There are many ways to plant churches; however, the model in the scriptures is one that begins with evangelism and ends with those new churches following the Lord in obedience" (279-80).

A closer view of the Great Commission by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20, as a biblical mandate should serve as an eye opener to believers that it is not a suggestion but a heavenly commandment which was given with the Muslims in mind. The Muslims are definitely among the lost Jesus had in mind. Arthur E. Graf emphatically puts it, "Jesus came into the world for a purpose, and this purpose he summarized briefly in His conversation with Zacchaeus: 'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost' (Lk 19:10). When he had finished His work and had shown His disciples His hands and His side, He made His purpose our purpose by declaring, 'As my father has sent me even so send I you' (Jh 20:21). This should therefore serve as a key challenge for the church being the vehicle for the fulfilment of God's redemptive purpose in eternity past, to be passionate on the art of evangelism to their Muslim neighborhood as pointed out by Clinton Bennett saying, "the task of preaching to Muslims is an urgent one, since

the Muslim world represents a largely unreached constituency. Hence, what is called the missionary imperative” (21).

In fact, God’s redemptive work in biblical narrative clearly shows that, throughout history we see God on a mission, to reconcile the world unto himself as evident with the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Moses, David, Jesus, Paul, and John. This purposeful mission was definitely with the Muslims as his creation in mind. This revelation to re-establish his kingdom in the hearts of mankind demonstrates God at work to restore creation to his original design before the fall of humanity (Gen.1:31; 2:8-15, 3:14 cf. 3:15; 12:1-3; Rev. 22:1-5). In these last days, the church which is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (Heb.1:1-4, Matt. 16:18) is the instrument set apart for God to fulfill his mission. This therefore calls for the priesthood of the believers. Peter asserts:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but have now obtained mercy (NKJV, 1Pet. 2:9-10).

Against this background that, J .Verkuyl paints the picture of God’s global perspective for the salvation of the entire human race saying, “The God who in the Old Testament identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who discloses to Moses his personal name, Yahweh, as the God of the whole world...The worldview of the Muslim towards one nation of Israel with this God expand to include the horizon of the entire world” (qtd.in Korosi 18).

In the light of the significance of evangelizing the Muslims as articulated by various scholars and Scriptures, I took an objective look at the major themes which

formed the frame work of this study of church planting among Muslims and its implications for today's church.

### **Research Themes**

Having taken an objective look at the biblical and theological foundations of this study along side the themes associated with them, this study then focused on some key research themes and sub themes which formed the basis of this qualitative work on the best practices of church planting among Muslims in the subject population of this work.

### **Relationship Building and Church planting**

The adherents of the Christian faith need to break every stronghold that may serve as a barrier for Muslims to be won over to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Thus, the need to build up a strong relationship with the Muslim through the show of agape love should serve as the bedrock upon which the message of salvation is shared. Woodberry aptly articulates this fact saying,

The love of God is attractive because in the Qur'an God loves those who love him-not those who reject faith (Al Imran 4:31-32). A Gambian Muslim exclaimed "God loves me just as I am" A West African was surprised by God's love of all people of all races including enemies...Muslims find this love expressed through Jesus, whom they already believe from the Qur'an to be without fault (Maryam 19:19), even when Mohamed is told to ask forgiveness for his sins (al-Fath 48: 2). (16)

### **Love as a Bridge to Muslims**

Relationship- building in the context of love is a gateway for reaching the unreached and unchurched Muslims in a given community. The expression of God's love to the Muslim ultimately serves as a bridge in the establishment of an intimate relationship between a church planter and a Muslim. Livingstone asserts, "once a relationship of trust with a less provincial Muslim mentor is established, it becomes naturally reciprocal for church planters to share their values through their life story. This can be done in a culturally sensitive way so that it not only makes sense to the befriended Muslim family, but also creates admiration for church planters, who are doing what they believe God and Jesus want them to do" (130).

Livingstone also vividly brings home this truth saying, "normally one cannot make disciples until friends are made. People do not voluntarily follow someone they do not like (except when they have ulterior motives), particularly in a society where conformity to tradition, the family's values (and therefore religion), and group decision making present formidable obstacles for the change agent" (130). Cate drives home this fact saying, "there is no substitute for prayer, love and a personal relationship for bringing Muslims into the light of our Savior. These require time, energy and high ranks in our priorities" (281).

In the light of Livingstone's and Cate's views on the value of love/relationship in church planting among the Muslims, it is apparent that the community of faith cannot express such love to their Muslim neighbors until the love of Christ is established in the hearts of the Christians. This was that type of love that Paul expressed to the church in Thessalonica in which he said, "we were gentle among you just as a nursing mother

cherishes her own children, so affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (IThess.2:7-8). The demonstration of such type of love shown by Paul to the Thessalonians, will facilitate church planting among the Muslims. K.K.Alavi underscores this fact saying, “before I met my new Christian friends, I had strong feelings against Christians because I had heard such bad report about them. Yet when I observed the missionary’s character, his way of life and his attitude toward Muslims, I knew that the accusations I had heard against Christians certainly did not apply to him. This made me think, was his love greater than that of the Muslims? Had the Messiah Jesus done more for him than my prophet had done for me? Like a magnet the love of Jesus attracted me” (11).

In the article “the incarnational witness to the Muslim Heart,” Bashir Abdol Massih concurs, “Love is the key to incarnational witness... The incarnational witness across cultural barriers to the Muslim demands that, it be a witness of love motivated by love, nothing less will suffice...the incarnational witness is one in whom love has worked so deeply that he seeks in every way possible to become like the hearer so that he can manifest the Gospel in thought, communication and religio cultural forms that relate meaningfully to the hearer” (50-51).

Apostle Paul clearly demonstrated this he related with the Jews and Gentiles (1Cor.9:20-23). Similarly, a practical demonstration of agape love to the Muslim is a gateway to winning the heart of the Muslims because they have a different perspective of God’s love. Their concept of God’s love differs from that of the worldview of the Christian. In the article, ‘culturally relevant themes about Christ’ Evertt W.Huffard

asserts, “to the Muslim, love is not the essential theme it is, to the Christian. Nor does the Muslim see the Cross as an expression of God’s love” (162). He sheds light on this point by showing his amazement on how the first missionary to the Muslims, Raymond Lull, was challenged by the lack of love on the part of the Muslims when he sailed to Tunis in 1292, but identified love as the outstanding element of Christianity (162). Huffard echoes this fact by quoting Lull, saying,

But in as much as the Christian believe more than this, and affirm that God so loved man that He was willing to become man, to endure poverty, ignominy, torture, and death for his sake, which Jews and Saracens do not teach concerning Him; therefore is the religion of the Christians, which thus reveals a love beyond all other love, superior to that of those which reveals it only in an inferior degree. Islam is a loveless religion. (qtd.in Huffard 162)

Huffard also points out how this theme of love as the core of the Gospel of Christ has attracted the attention of other contemporary writers like- Gairdner, Kenneth Cragg, Phill Parshall, and Massih (163). This implies that the extent in which we share our love with the Muslims, will challenge them to see God’s love at work. This is evident from the fact that the Muslims have a different concept of God’s love for mankind. They cannot comprehend the mystery of God demonstrating his love for humanity by letting go of his son Jesus to be killed by sinners and died a shameful death on the cross meant for criminals. The churches in ECWA therefore have a major responsibility of expressing God’s love through amicable relationship and love for Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, if they are to effectively plant churches in the cultural context of the



Mandinka and Jola as the predominant ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **Cross-Cultural Communication and Church Planting**

Effectively communication of the gospel in a Muslim context, calls for the church to understand the world view of their Muslim neighborhoods. Hesselgrave argues, “Missionaries need not only to know the message for the world, but they also need to know the world in which the message must be communicated” (426-27). Muslims have various confused misconceptions about the Christian faith that serves as bottlenecks for them to break away from their Islamic background and embrace the unchanging message of Salvation. Before the church planter can evangelize within a given Muslim context, it is imperative for him to get an insight into some of the fundamental misconceptions which will serve as a gateway for him to effectively communicate the Gospel and ultimately plant churches in that given community. Colin Chapman, in his article ‘Rethinking the Gospel for Muslims’, quoting a report of the 1981 Pattaya consultation, “Christian Witness to Muslims” which stated,

As soon as we begin to listen to Muslims and try to share the gospel, we begin to realize how difficult it is to express ourselves in a way that Muslims understand. The painfulness of this experience ought to drive us back, in order to learn new ways of understanding our faith and relating it to the Muslim mind.  
(13-16)

Chapman reiterates this point in, ‘Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road’, saying,

Although there are considerable differences of language and culture between Muslims of different countries, enough is distinctive about the Muslim mind set throughout the world for us to hope that, if we persevere, we may find ways of expressing the good news that are more intelligible and more relevant to Muslims than the traditional ways we have inherited the Gospel. (106-107)

I quite agree with the views expressed by the report of the 1981 Pattaya consultation and that of Chapman. They serve as signals that the community of faith in ECWA and other churches need to develop a paradigm shift as they engage with their neighborhoods in the Muslim majority West Coast Region of The Gambia. Such an approach in church planting among the Muslims will definitely yield positive results. Against this background Eugene A. Nida argues saying, "If a missionary is to be successful in communicating, he must recognize the distinctions that exist between various classes of people and make his message applicable to their circumstances and transmittable by means of their traditional networks of communication" (460).

Nida's position greatly underscores the value of understanding cross- cultural communication as a bridge to positively reach Muslims. This fundamental problem of cross- cultural communication between Christians and Muslims is aptly concluded by Larson, in his article saying,

Christians and Muslim share different cultures and it is in the differences between them that collisions originate...when Christians and Muslims meet, therefore, it is not with clean slates but under conditions established in their respective groups and in terms of what each knows at that point in his life and how it is organized in his mind. They engage each other as outsiders. Well-

defined boundaries keep them separate. They may be able to talk freely about the weather, but when it comes to the central issues of life, like their respective worldview and lifestyle, they tend to avoid each other. When they cannot they tend to collide. (36-37)

Against this background I endeavor to take a brief look at some fundamental misconceptions between Muslims and Christians in this work.

### **Misconceptions in Communication**

The challenges to church planting in a Muslim context can best be looked at in the light of misconceptions in the art of communicating the Gospel to the Muslim.

Among some of the scholars who have addressed the art of communicating to Muslims in this study are: William J Saal, Esposito, and Green. Saal points out six key Muslim beliefs which contradict the Christian faith. These are listed as follows:

I. Christians are polytheists; Muslims believe that Christians worship three gods: God the Father, Mary and Jesus. However, based on the Qur'an, they are convinced that there is only one God and not three as evident in the following Surars in the Qur'an: (4:171; 5:72-73; 5:115 -116; 112:1-4).

II. Jesus was human not divine- Muslims believe that Jesus was a great Prophet but never possessed the nature of God. The Qur'an asserts: "verily the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is as the likeness of Adam: he created him out of the dust, and then said unto him, 'Be' and he was" (Qur'an 3:59).

III. Jesus was not killed on the Cross- In spite of the fact that there are conflicting views among Muslims about the details of the crucifixion, there is a consensus that he

was not killed on the cross. Muslims believe that, Jesus was replaced by someone else while he was transported to heaven by God (Qur'an 4:156-158)

IV. Jesus will occupy a significant place on the last day- Muslims believe that Jesus presently occupies an inferior level in paradise, but will return to the earth and live for forty years in a different perspective. He will marry, have children, ultimately die and be buried in Medina, where he would rise up to face Judgement from God.

V. The Holy Spirit is one of the titles of the Angel Gabriel (Qur'an 97:1-4).

VI. Jesus foretold the coming of Mohamed- Muslims are convinced that, the promise made by Jesus of sending the Holy Spirit or the Comforter, as they waited in the upper room, was a reference to Mohamed who will come following the departure of Jesus( Qur'an 61;6 cf.Jh.1416-17; 25-26 and 16:7-11) ( 64-66).

John L. Esposito a scholar on Islam concurs with Saal on most of the contentions raised. The former also highlighted additional misconceptions held by Muslims about Christianity which are as follows:

i. Muslims do not believe the doctrine of original sin, and by implication, there is no theological need for the atonement of Sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

ii. Muslims believe that each one will be responsible for his own salvation, exclusive of assistance from others like Jesus or Mohamed (32).

Similarly, Green brings out six reasons, showing misconceptions that make it difficult for Christians to communicate the gospel to Muslims:

i. Islam has a different concept of God. To the Christian, God's self-revelation to humanity through Jesus Christ indicates that man could establish a personal relationship

with God (immanent), while Islam holds to the belief that God is transcendent, and as such God is so far away that no personal relationship could be built between man and God.

ii. Islam has a very different understanding of Jesus. To the Muslim, Jesus was a prophet of God, but lesser than Mohammed. They believed that he did not die on the cross but was taken away to heaven.

iii. Islam has a different understanding of human nature and human sin. Man did not inherit original sin, while the Christian believes that sin originated from Adam and Eve, and man could only be restored through Jesus' death on the cross.

iv. Islam and Christianity have different conceptions of the Holy Book. To the Muslim the Qur'an was written in heaven and revealed to Mohamed in Arabic. It is therefore infallible. While to the Christian, the Bible was written by men from diverse cultural backgrounds with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore believed to be corrupt.

v. Islam has a different conception of religious assurance. The Muslim is not assured of forgiveness and even uncertain of his fate after death; unlike the Christian who is assured of forgiveness in Christ and assurance of being in heaven by virtue of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

vi. Islam has a different understanding of the Holy Spirit. They believe that the promise of the Holy Spirit pointed to the coming of Prophet Mohamed (52-53).

These misconceptions raised by Saal, Esposito, and Green respectively, signal the value that should be attached to the art of effective communication of the gospel to Muslims. They can serve as hindrances to the spread of the gospel. It is apparent that

church planters in a Muslim context have to be knowledgeable about these misconceptions and with the help of the Holy Spirit, resort to an effective way of conveying the message of salvation to their Muslim neighbors and subsequently plant churches.

### **Contextualization and Church Planting**

The need for contextualization of the message in our determination to reach the Muslims is critical in order to bridge the gap between Muslims and Christianity and subsequently facilitate church planting in a Muslim community. This therefore demands the need to look at the definition of contextualization in the light of Scriptures, and its implications for church planting among Muslims in a postmodern and pluralistic world.

#### **Definition of Contextualization**

It is evident from Scripture that God himself contextualized the message to ensure that the church serves as God's agent of mission as exemplified through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Charles Kraft articulates this fact by describing contextualization as

A process in which God is recognized as THE Contextualizer- who wants to be understood, and who reveals His purposes through both people and events. This process reaches its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ who uniquely communicates the Father's character and purpose – so that the incarnation became the defining expression of all effective communication. (127)

This point of view was also expressed by Hesselgrave and Rommen saying, “the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, word, and will of God in a

way that is faithful to God's revelation...and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts" (200).

### **Implications of Definitions of Contextualization**

In the light of these various definitions by Kraft, Hesselgrave, and Rommen, it is apparent that the contextualization of Christianity was vividly reflected in the New Testament with the primary objective of fulfilling the Great Commission mandate. Saal echoes this truth saying,

The goal of contextualization is the fulfilment of our Lord's commission as defined in Matt. 28:18-20; Lk 24:44-49; Jn. 20:21; Acts.1:8; that is to present the claims of Christ clearly and persuasively, to exhort people to faith in Christ, to teach them to be His disciples and to gather them into churches that are culturally rooted in their society of origin. (151)

I agree with Saal's point of view. This certainly signals the need for the church to purposefully contextualize the unchanging message of Christ in order to positively reach the cultural worldview of the Muslims in their approach to worship God. Saal emphatically drives home this fact saying,

The Qur'an is probably the most powerful cultural influence in Muslim society. Therefore, every approach must make a serious effort to relate to the Qur'an and to Muslim religious thought in general. To ignore the Qur'an opens the door to all kinds of responses that are unsatisfactory. The hermeneutical method used to interpret the Bible cross culturally serves as the key element in a contextual approach. Hermeneutics must also apply equally to other kinds of Islamic symbols that Christians might use cross culturally. (151)

Church planters must therefore be alert as they engage with Muslims who come from a different cultural worldview. For instance, at a recently held seminar in March 2016, on the theme: “Finishing the Assignment” (Matt.2:14), one of the speakers, Pastor ModouCamara (a Muslim Background Believer), spoke on contextualization of the gospel among Muslims. He emphatically brought out the following cultural beliefs as guidelines to church planters in a Muslim context:

- i. Muslims frown at the placing of the Bible on the floor.
- ii. The value of meal sharing is a reflection of communal life. This implies church planters should endeavor not to turn down an offer of eating in a given community.
- iii. They also frown on women putting on trousers. This implies that the dress code is critical when evangelizing among them.
- iv. Moreover, Muslim background believers need to worship in a church setting where people can sit on the mat barefooted, with no drumming during the time of worship.

Parshall contends that the new Muslim believer has three options: i. stay in the mosque as some kind of Jesus Muslim, ii. follow the well-established tradition leaving the mosque, be repudiated by their family, leaving their community, and identifying with the non-Muslim convert congregation or iii. stay in their community as part of a homogeneous house church with other Muslim converts (qtd.in Livingstone 179).

Another key element of contextualization on the part of the church planter, as he articulates the message of reconciliation to the Muslim, is the ability to identify beliefs



about God that cuts across Islam and Christianity. This easily serves as a bridge in the art of evangelizing among Muslim adherents.

### **Biblical and Theological Basis for Contextualization**

The need to communicate God's Word in culturally relevant ways, in a pluralist postmodern world, is critical. The contextualization of the gospel is quite evident in the New Testament. In an article on culture and the Bible, Kraft emphatically states that "the Gospel is to be planted as a seed that will sprout within and be nourished by the rain and nutrients in the cultural soil of the receiving people" (404).

For example, Jesus Christ, a male Palestinian Jew in a given geographical location in a given time, translated the Gospel in the context in which he lived. He communicated with his audience, not in theological abstractions, but by making use of practical illustrations from everyday life such as farming, fishing, etc. This therefore made it possible for his message to have a lasting transforming impact on his audience.

Similarly, through the conversion experience of Cornelius (Acts 10, 11) and Paul's teachings (1Cor.9:19-20, 25), we can clearly see that God's love cuts across national, ethnic, or cultural identities. This subsequently led to the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome; thereby fulfilling God's ultimate mission of reaching the Gentiles (Gen. 12:3 cf. Acts 1:8, 12-28).

Moreover, the decision at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and Paul's various preaching styles in the book of Acts, bring to the reader the significance of contextualizing the message in our contemporary times. Paul tailored his message based on the specific audience, geographical location, and occasion at the time. Paul's style of sharing his message had an impact on the following nationalities in the book of Acts:

Jews (Acts 13:16-41), Greeks (Acts 14:8-20), and the Athenians (Acts 17:16-34). In chapter 12 of Payne, Stan Cuthrie, stated that “The message must be tailored or contextualized in such a way as to remain faithful to the biblical text while understandable in and relevant to the receptor’s context” (qtd in Payne 1875).

Contextualization does not however imply that we need to compromise the truth claims of the gospel in order to suit the worldview of a particular cultural setting. The need for faithfulness to the biblical text is vital. Paul, for example, did not compromise the unchanging truth claims of the gospel, even as he engaged with his Jewish, Greek and Athenian audiences as could be seen in the passages indicated above. Against the background of the various forms of contextualization depending on the context, Livingstone concludes that, “the churches established should be committed to reduce every unnecessary hindrance, both sociological and theological, to the Muslim becoming a follower of Christ and enjoying church life, while realizing that the world will be no friend to God’s people and that suffering is inevitable” (186).

### **Discipleship and Church Planting**

Disciple making is an integral part of church planting in a given ministry context as explicit in the Great Commission (Matt.28:18-20).The context of Disciple making calls for “fresh churches” to be planted. This is suggestive of the emphasis made by Jesus in raising and building disciples that ran with the heavenly mandate after Jesus had accomplished his Redemptive mission.Similarly, Paul, the first century pioneer church planter planted churches by duplicating his life into others through discipleship building as evident in the training offered for his disciples in the hall of Tyrannus. Against this background, the theme of discipleship building and its implications constitute a major

focus on this study of best practices in church planting. Specific attention is drawn on the implications of discipleship in the world of Muslim background believers (MBBs).

### **Definition of Discipleship**

The word *discipleship* is open to various definitions by different scholars as evident in this study. Discipleship is not limited to church attendance, nor a classroom environment, or a specific period of training for the convert. It is rather presenting and applying the truths of the gospel to a convert, resulting in that person becoming a disciplined transformed follower of Jesus Christ, who in turn produces himself in the life of others so as to equip them to be mature in the faith. Tom Nebel and Gary Rohrmayer assert that disciple making is communicating the gospel with clarity and conviction, so that people can embrace Christ as Lord and Savior and become reproducing followers serving within a healthy community of faith” (76). Hadidian concurs with this point saying,

Discipling others is the process by which a Christian with a life worth emulating commits himself for an extended period of time to a few individuals who have been won to Christ, the purpose being to aid and guide their growth to maturity and equip them to reproduce themselves in a third spiritual generation. (31-32)

The aspect of the disciple reproducing himself in others is emphasized by Nebel, Rohrmayer, and Hadidian. In fact, Hadidian’s definition on disciple making opens the mind of the contemporary readers to the principle of reproducing the mind of Christ in three generations- as exemplified by- Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy who lived an exemplary life among the Thessalonians while the latter, ministered to the people in

Macedonia and Achaia (1Thess.1:6-8). Similarly, Paul shared this principle of multiplication process with his spiritual son Timothy (2 Tim. 2:2).

According to Webber, this process of discipleship entails a lifelong commitment of believing in the Lord (John 20: 31), belonging to a community of faith (Acts2:42, 47), and behaving in a way appropriate to the kingdom ethics (Rom.12:2) (72). This process of disciple making is key in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt.28:19-20) as articulated by Berton Todd Herndon in his dissertation saying,

Jesus' statement has one main verb *mathateusate* (make disciples), and it is in the imperative mood (command mood). Three participles are related to the verb "going, baptizing and teaching." The participial instructions are subordinate in a linguistic sense to the main verb "make disciples." The participles are no less important than the main verb; however, they are the means to the end of making disciples. The focus, then, is not so much on going to all nations, or on baptizing or teaching. It is upon the making of disciples. (2001).

This point of view is vividly expressed by Bill Hull as he addressed pastors on disciple making saying: "the Great Commission has been worshipped, but not obeyed. The church has tried to get world evangelization without disciple making" (70). The position of this work is quite in agreement with Herndon and Hull which has shaped my theology on church planting to be focused on discipleship.

### **Biblical and Theological Basis for Discipleship**

Jesus' three years of ministry show that, he invested his life into these few men more than the others in order to ensure the continuity of His ministry (Matt. 28:18-20 cf. Acts 1-6; 7-12,13-28). Hadidian articulates this fact saying,

The discipling ministry was supreme in Christ's life. He revealed the lost with the Gospel and reproduced Himself in men. But the work remains unfinished. Every believer from Pentecost to "the new heavens and new earth" is engaged in a monumental task, that of finishing the unfinished work of Christ." (9)

A closer look at Hadidian's perspective on disciple making, indicate that the church planter is faced with the challenge of developing converts into complete maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:13 cf. Phil.3:12). This subsequently enables the disciple, to reproduce himself in the lives of others (2Tim. 2:2), thereby leading to the planting of churches. The church is reproduced where disciples are multiplied. We plant churches by making disciples, but we do not make disciples by planting churches.

This provides the reason why the Gospel of Mathew and other books of the Bible shed light on Jesus' relationship with his disciples more than He did with the multitudes that gathered to hear him preach. The Bible clearly shows us several differences in the relationship Jesus had with his disciples and the one he had with the multitudes. Below are a few instances descriptive of Jesus' relationship with his disciples:

He called and chose the disciples personally (Matt. 4:18-22 cf. Luke 6:13; John 1:42-43)

He taught them on a deeper level (Matt. 13:11).

He gave them power for ministry (Matt. 10:1).

He sent them out for specific ministry (Matt. 10:5).

He gave them special instructions for that ministry (Matt. 10:5-42).

He gave them authority to baptize (John 4:1-2).

He called them to a deeper level of commitment (Matt. 16:24-27; John 6:60-69).

He gave them the keys to the kingdom (Matt. 16:19).

He showed them his glory (Matt. 17:1-9).

He baptized them with his Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

From the above description of Jesus' relationship with his disciples, it could be concluded that, disciples are made, not born. This underscores the reason why Matthew concluded his Gospel with Jesus commanding his disciples, in the Great Commission, to make disciples (Matt 28:16-20; Matt. 8:23). Moreover, the disciples of Jesus in the book of Acts reproduced themselves in the lives of others as the church kept growing after Pentecost with no emphasis on buildings/structures (Acts2:47).

Discipleship does not only reflect a biblical basis, but theological foundations. For example, John Wesley, the father of Methodism, maintains that the Bible is the primary source for Christian beliefs. In spite of the fact that he made use of church traditions, reason, and personal experience, while in Dublin in 1750, Wesley "exhorted the society to stand fast in the good old Bible way and not to move from it to the right hand nor to the left" (Vol.2: 180). He also argued for the significance of discipleship, saying, "I am more and more convinced that the devil himself desires nothing more than that the people of any place should be half awakened and then left to themselves to fall

asleep again. Therefore, I determine, by the grace of God, not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow” (Vol. 1:416).

In conclusion, if the church is to make a global impact in reaching the unreached in a postmodern and ever-changing world, the urgent need of the hour is not investing so much in putting up structures/buildings, but in investing time, money, and human resources to raise up a spirit-filled transformed community of believers who can positively impact their generation by establishing congregations through whom church planting movements would be established. This calls for a paradigm shift in the light of the various methods or models of church planting in our contemporary society.

This does not however imply that church planters do not need structures in the art of church planting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; we do need them of course. However, in the light of the dynamics of a postmodern society, our worldview of Church planting has to be primarily mission and kingdom focused to such an extent that, we would look beyond the walls of the physical structures to the raising up of disciples as explicitly pointed out in the Great Commission.

### **Discipleship and Muslim Background Believers**

Discipleship is key to the raising up of a transformed community and the ultimate multiplication of churches. A disciple is needed to reproduce disciples in a given community. Not all believers are disciples; on the contrary, all disciples are believers that are transformed into Christian maturity by the help of the Holy Spirit (Col.1:28). Scott J. Jones captures this point saying, “Discipleship aims at Christian maturity” (144). Against this background, Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, “if you abide in my words you are my disciples indeed” (John.8:31). This implies that, if the

Church as a Living Organism is to make lasting impact among Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), it is imperative that disciples raised by the leadership of that given church are equipped and empowered to raise Muslim Background Believers as disciples. Someone who is a Disciple can develop compassion, patience, and passion in reaching the Muslim with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is therefore foundational for raising disciples among Muslim Background Believers and raise them as disciples. Conversion of a Muslim is not enough, but that person needs to grow into Christian maturity (being a disciple), if he is to stand against the challenges he will face with in his new- found faith. It is therefore imperative that Churches should raise not only believers, but disciples, who are prepared to pay the price in ensuring that Muslim Background Believers are disciplined.

### **Challenges of Muslim Background Believers**

It is apparent that one of the key Missiologial challenges in contemporary times is the cost of confessing and accepting Christ by a Muslim background believer. Such a person has the challenge of letting go of his 'sense of identity' with the Muslim community, and comes on board as a Muslim convert with series of theological baggage, which makes him/her vulnerable to persecution from his family, and community.

Ron Peck points out, "When a new convert from Islam makes his faith known to his family, he may be totally cut off from his family members. This can create a serious financial hardship" (2). Moreover he could ultimately be killed for bringing reproach to the family lineage. PhilParshall aptly echoes this fact,



The greatest tragedy in a Muslim's life is to see dishonor brought upon the family's name. Such shame will cause internal convulsions within the complete extended-family structures. The hurt, embarrassment, and perplexity of family dishonor will have a negative effect on the name and reputation of future generations. (89)

This is evident from the fact that, Islam according to J. Christy Wilson "is a very tightly-knit system. It determines just how every act of life shall be performed, from morning until evening and during the night, and it exercises control over all of life, from the cradle to the grave" (7).

George W. Braswell, Jr. concurs, "*theumma* established by Muhammad cuts across all lines of race, class, tribe, and ethnicity. Religion was integrated with society, and the new community was Muslim."(113). Bruce J Nicholls concludes on this subject, by painting a vivid picture of the background of the Muslim believer saying,

Islam is more than a religious faith, it is a complete way of life, al-din. It is a system which integrates all religious, social, economic and political institutions...A modern Muslim may be indifferent to his religious faith but he will want to remain a Muslim for cultural reasons. To change his religion would mean to cut himself off from his family and the whole of Islamic society. Thus, the Christian response to dawah must be cultural as well as religious, if our evangelism is to be effective and new churches planted. (119-120)

Phil Parshal, in his text, "The Cross and the Crescent, Understanding the Muslim Mind and Heart" also describes the background of the Muslim convert saying, "The total way of life is strongly emphasized in Islam. The Muslim worldview is integrated and

cohesive. Segmentation of life into categories is resisted. One's activities are to be governed by the realization that Allah is involved in every aspect of being and doing..." (19).

The descriptions of the challenges encountered by Muslim background believers (MBBs), painted by the above named scholars, signal the urgent need for churches in the twenty first century, to raise disciples who in turn will reproduce themselves in the lives of the Muslim background believers (MBB).

### **Implications of Discipleship and Muslim Background Believers**

Firstly, discipleship is implicitly critical for Muslim background believers to stay committed and faithful to their newly found faith in Christ in the face of challenges. Secondly, the writings of these scholars echo the fact that both Muslim background believers and disciples in a given ministry context (churches) are to be prepared to pay the price if an indigenous, evangelistic, and culturally relevant church is to be established in a Muslim majority nation. Thirdly, this will ultimately result in the raising up of indigenous leaders ( leadership development) in a given ministry context who are equipped to run with the vision of God's mission of making disciples and subsequently plant churches among the unreached people groups. Autrey states:

It was the policy of the New Testament churches for their members to push out into new communities and preach the Gospel, win new converts. And organize the community where they were located and pushed out into new areas repeating the same pattern. It was Paul's practice to go back to these young organizations, instructing them and providing them the competent leadership to guide them in the programme of evangelizing... (Qtd. in Stephens18).

This pattern of church planting was reflective of John Wesley of the Methodist mission, the Presbyterians, Baptists and others in the Great Awakening (Stephens 18). Subsequently, the work continued to thrive following the disappearance of the respective vision bearers from the scene. This implies that, the need to raise indigenous leaders among disciples from Muslim background believers is fundamental to the continuity and sustainability of a given church both in the presence and absence of the vision bearer of that church. Sadly, some churches fail to thrive and eventually members of that given local church scatter under the leadership of other pastors/mission heads primarily because the pioneer and vision bearer of that given church failed to raise up leaders with vision, effectively disciplined to carry on the task of church planting. In some cases, the members of that church continue to stay in a given church after the return of the missionary in question, instead of that missionary getting reports of the spiritual and numerical growth of the church planted, instead there is a power struggle among the members which hinder the sustainability of the church in the absence of the missionary.

Fourthly, leaders who have been raised up among Muslim background believers, through discipleship prove to be more determined, committed, courageous, and equipped to reach the Muslims in their community. They have a vivid understanding of the worldview of the Muslims. Though at the initial stage of their walk with the Lord, the Muslim community did not accommodate them or became resentful of their teachings, however, through the help of the Holy Spirit and as a result of the spirit of steadfastness in the midst of challenges, coupled with an exemplary life style lived among the Muslims in their neighborhood, they eventually are able to make a positive impact in communicating the gospel, among the unreached people group.

If ECWA and other churches in the WCR are to make a lasting impact in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of the Gambia, this calls for the need to raise up effective leaders from among those disciplined.

### **Principles of Church Planting Among Muslims**

The preceding close look at some of the key misconceptions between Christians and Muslims, calls for the need of church planters to understand some fundamental principles in evangelizing Muslims, in order to realize a fruitful indigenous and culturally relevant church to be planted in a majority Muslim community. Charles R.Marsh, in his article “sharing our faith with Muslims,” vividly articulates nine principles to serve as guidelines if Christians are to effectively plant churches in a Muslim context:

- i. Church planters should refrain from condemning Islam or speaking in a derogatory manner of the person of Mohammad.
- ii. The church planter should remember that a Muslim is a believer in the one true God and in his laws.
- iii. There is the fear of God in the heart of every true Muslim.
- iv. Most Muslims have a definite sense of sin. Though their religion offers no assurance of forgiveness of sin, nevertheless, they have a deep desire for the forgiveness of sin. This accounts for the reason they continually ask for forgiveness of their sins praying daily.
- v. Muslims are human beings created in God’s image and not objects.

vi. The life style of the church planter (evangelist) is very vital to either winning over the heart of the Muslim or hardening his heart to the gospel. We should not just profess our faith but practice what we believe.

vii. There is the need to take note of common grounds, which are true for both Muslims and Christians, build upon them as bridges to help them embrace the entire truth of the Word of God.

viii. Muslims respond to love. Our demonstration of love to them serves as a gateway for them to embrace the gospel. They can see God in us through the love demonstrated to them. This demands that we should be keen listeners to comprehend their world view during the art of communicating the gospel to them.

ix. We must have total reliance on the leading of the Holy Spirit(302-06).

John T. Seamands also highlights six principles to ensure effective communication of the gospel to Muslims:

i. Knowledge of the Life of Mohammad.

ii. Knowledge of the six articles of Faith.

iii. Knowledge of five pillars of Islam.

iv. Knowledge of the fact that Islam is not only a religion but a way of life that cuts across all social and political systems.

V. Identifying common grounds between Islam and Christianity that will serve as a bridge to communicate the Gospel to the Muslim.

vi. Knowledge of the Theological barriers in Islam; the validity of the scriptures, the doctrine of the trinity, the humanity of Jesus and the death of Jesus Christ (200-14).

Jack Redford also brings out key principles in church planting:

- i. The Holy Spirit is basic to all that is done in church planting.
- ii. Evangelism is fundamental in Church Planting. Effective church planting cannot be done in the absence of Evangelism.
- iii. People are basic in Church Planting...Churches are not ends but are planted to glorify God and serve the needs of the community.
- iv. Love must permeate all church planting activities.
- v. Flexibility is crucial in all church planting. Flexibility does not indicate a change in theology but a change in methodology. The truth still stands, but the mode of presentation is tailored to the context, in order to meet the needs of the moment. For example, flexibility in worship styles, building, and church activities based on the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- vi. We must build bridges to the people such as meeting some basic needs of the community not to show compromise but indicator that we share the felt needs of the community.
- vi. We need to raise up effective human leaders (8-23).

A closer study of these principles from Marsh, Seamands, and Redford show some key principles which cut across such as: the value of love, the role of the Holy Spirit, the need to build bridges, identifying common grounds, knowledge of the barriers in Islam and contextualization.

### **Research Design Literature**

The research design of this study was a pre- intervention qualitative work. This type of research design, enabled the investigator to make an indepth enquiry into the research problem of the study in the light of the research questions guiding this

project. The use of this research design therefore served as the blue print for data collection and analysis of this qualitative project. The type of research design used in this study facilitated the identification of the problems associated with the planting of indigenous churches in the targeted population. Subsequently, the data generated and analyzed for this study guided the researcher in discovering the best practices and major findings for the practice of ministry in the subject population. In the light of the dynamics of the research design of this project, the literature of this study, vividly pointed out the major themes which helped to address the statement of the problem and research questions. Outstanding among these themes were the following: relationship building, cross-cultural communication, contextualization, and discipleship building. Since this project was focused on investigating the problems of indigenous church planting in a specific Muslim majority context, and subsequently identify the best practices of CPM in that geographical region, these research themes which ran through the literature of this study, greatly reflected on the research design used for this study.

The identified research themes in the literature gave me insights into an understanding of the problem of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim context and possible best practices of CPM in a Muslim context. This therefore served as the framework for me in collecting and analyzing the needed data relevant to the problem and research questions guiding this qualitative study. In conclusion, I based the research design for this project on an exploratory research, in the context of making in-depth enquiry into the problems of the study, discovery of findings and subsequently offering the needed recommendations for the phenomenon being investigated, in the light of the research questions.

## **Summary of Literature**

My engagement with different authors has opened my eyes to the following main themes relevant to my study: Discipleship of Muslim background believers, the value of relationship building, cross- cultural communication and church planting, misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians, contextualization and church planting, and key principles for church planters in a Muslim context. Some key definitions associated with themes like: church planting, discipleship, contextualization and indigenous churches gave great insight on my research. The diverse arguments presented by various theologians and missiologists on these major themes coupled with definitions on words listed above, served as invaluable insights in my writing.

### **Church Planting**

The concept of church planting has provoked the minds of Missiologists. The big question is why do we labour to emphasize on church planting when there is no scriptural mandate to do so? In fact, Livingstone argues that the word “church planter” is not being mentioned in Scripture. He asserts that the church planter Wendell Evans of Arab World Ministries traces the term *Church Planter* to 1Cor.3:6, where Paul writes, “I planted...Apollos watered ...God made it grow” (72). I quite subscribe to the view that there is no scriptural mandate to church planting but disciple making (Matt.28:19). However, taking a closer look at Livingstone’s definition of the term ‘*church planting*’ which “refers to the whole process of evangelizing, discipling, training, and organizing a group of believers to a level of development permitting it to function as a viable church independent of the agent(s) who brought it into being” (73), it is implicit from this definition that the elements of evangelism, discipling capacity building, and



establishment of an indigenous church which features in this definition have scriptural bases. This definition is relevant to my ministry context. If ECWA churches and other churches are to establish viable indigenous and culturally relevant churches in the predominantly Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region, this calls on the leadership not only to communicate the gospel among the Muslims in that community, but to intentionally equip and empower the Muslim converts through discipleship, training and eventually raise up indigenous leaders who would reproduce themselves in planting other indigenous churches.

**Discipleship.**

A closer study of my Literature Review points out the emphasis laid by Nebel, Rohrmayer, and Hadidian, on the value of a disciple reproducing himself in the lives of others. I quite agree with the definitions given by these authors, because this aspect of reproduction is fundamental to the growth of the church in a given community. This confirms the scriptural mandate to the church for disciple making and not the planting of churches. Churches are planted as disciples are raised. In my context, it is very significant that Muslim background believers are disciplined to give birth to the raising of indigenous leaders, who would reproduce themselves in the lives of others and subsequently plant culturally relevant indigenous churches. Ironically, even though ECWA churches are engaged in the raising of some disciples, they are not primarily from Muslim backgrounds, but believers who have moved over to ECWA from other churches.

### **Discipleship of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs)**

This is a theme that cuts across a number of the books and articles I engaged with in the course of this study. The need to intentionally disciple Muslim background believers is key to the planting of indigenous churches, considering the challenges that they are normally faced with by virtue of making a decision to embrace the Christian faith. My engagement with authors like Ron Peck, Phill Parshall, J.Christy Wilson, and Bruce Nicholls show that, Islam is a total way of life characterized by a strong sense of identity with one's family and the entire Muslim community. This therefore makes Muslim background believers vulnerable to many challenges that may cause them to be disowned by the Muslim community or where possible be killed for bringing a reproach to their families and the Muslim community. This scenario descriptive of Muslim background believers is a true picture in my ministry context.

This therefore makes ministry among the Mandinka and Jola in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, an uphill task to reach, in appreciation of the price that it may cost them for identifying themselves with a new found faith in Christ. In the light of the challenges that Muslim background believers face, it is pertinent that ECWA churches prayerfully map out strategic and life transforming measures of discipling those few Muslim converts which by God's grace they may win over to the Christian faith. Effective discipleship measures are needed for Muslim background believers to stand the test of time.

This is critical because Muslim background believers who are properly discipled could eventually be raised up as indigenous leaders who understand the worldview of

Islam and have the courage, passion, perseverance, and strategy in planting churches in their given community.

### **Contextualization**

The definition of contextualization in my Literature Review reveals a common thread of thought that runs through the minds of- Kraft, Kato, Hesselgrave, Smalley and Saal. They actually articulated the value of communicating the gospel in such a way that it is relevant to the respondents in that given culture. This is very apt in my ministry context of a majority Muslim community. I personally subscribe to the view of Saal that church planters must be alert as they engage with Muslims from a different cultural world view and that the goal of contextualization is actually geared towards the fulfilment of the Great Commission.

I am convinced that, the Mandinka and Jola who are the predominant ethnic groups in the subject population are so rooted in their Islamic culture that it would take, communicating the gospel to them in a way relevant to their world view for them to be won over to the Christian faith. For instance, church planters cannot just resort to the traditional evangelical method of asking Muslim background believers to immediately desert their Muslim community and come over to the church setting. I quite agree with Parshall's opinion of the need for the Muslim background believer to staying in a house church with other Muslim converts. This can definitely work in my ministry context as articulated in my Literature Review by Rev. ModouCamara during a conference on contextualization of the Gospel among Muslims from the 14-19 of February,2016. As a Fula man from a Muslim background, he contextualized the message in such a way that, Muslim converts worship in a house setting with no chairs but seated on the mat. This

approach had a dramatic impact on the advancement of the gospel among Fula's in that community. ECWA church leaders definitely need to resort to such contextual approach instead of spending so much money putting up churches patterned after Western culture.

### **Indigenous Churches**

Anderson Rufus and Henry Venn give a vivid description of an indigenous church in Murray's text as the three selves namely: 'Self-governing', 'self-supporting' and 'self-propagating'. In his opinion, a church that is 'self-governing' makes its own decisions, 'self-supporting' can support itself financially, while 'self-propagating' has the ability to spread the Gospel on her own.

These three features do reflect an autonomous church. These features of an indigenous church are far from the reality among ECWA Churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Ironically, most of the churches in this geographical location are being pastored by non- Gambians. This subsequently serves as a bottleneck in communicating the gospel to the Muslims. Even though some of the pastors in those churches are predominantly natives of the land, the irony is that they are not from a Muslim background, but Christians who transferred from other denominations to ECWA churches in that community. This implies that, in spite of the fact that the members can communicate in the local language, but since they do not understand the world view of the Muslims, self-propagation of the message of salvation to the Muslim neighborhood is adversely affected. Moreover, major decisions concerning the running of the local churches in that community have to come from either the ECWA administrator namely, Chammang Blessing, or the ECWA coordinator in the Gambia, namely Rev. YohannaTurba.

The irony is that both of them are Nigerians and not indigenes of the land. This poses a challenge to the self-governing. The self-supporting aspect is also a key challenge. This is evident from the fact that basic ministry needs of the resident pastors of these churches in the West Coast Region of the Gambia are high, such as the cost of rent, utility bills, and the payment of salaries has to come from the headquarters church based in Kanifing South with Rev. Yohanna Turba as resident Pastor. If ECWA churches are to thrive in the Gambia following the return of the ECWA Missionaries from the Gambia to Jos, Nigeria, intentional methods must be prayerfully sorted out. Doing so would lead to establishment of indigenous churches descriptive of Anderson and Venn. Smalley however concludes that, “until we are willing for the church to have different manifestations in different cultures rather than export the denominational patterns rooted in our history ... we will not have indigenous churches” (81).

### **Cross- Cultural Communication**

Another key theme that cuts across a number of books read is cross cultural communication. This has subsequently given birth to a series of misconceptions between Christians and Muslims. Since Christians and Muslims come from different cultural backgrounds, a breakdown in communication is inevitable. These misconceptions serve as hindrances to the communication of the gospel among the Muslims. Against this background various missiologists like: Saal, Esposito, Green, Bennet, Chapman, Nida, and Larson, have expressed their views on this very crucial theme. What holds true for all of them is the fact that, Christians and Muslims come from different cultural backgrounds which shape their attitude towards God’s redemptive plan for humanity (John 3:16). Outstanding among them are concepts of assurance of salvation, the Godhead, the

divinity of Jesus and the death of Christ on the Cross. I quite agree with Chapman who maintains that, in spite of the differences between Muslims and Christians, there is a need to find relevant ways of communicating the gospel. This implies that, if ECWA Churches in the Gambia are to effectively plant churches in the West Coast Region, a deeper understanding of the misconceptions between Muslims and Christians in that community must be identified and understood. I am confident that this will serve as a bridge to effectively communicate the gospel. Other schools of thoughts like- Seamands, Marsh, and Redford have provided key guiding principles that could facilitate church planting in a Muslim majority nation. The suggested principles in my Literature Review are very applicable in my ministry context. The leadership of ECWA has to pay keen attention to these principles if they are to make a life transforming impact in church planting among the Muslims in the west Coast Region of the Gambia. Prominent among them are- the need to identify common grounds between Islam and Christianity, the knowledge of barriers between Islam and Christianity, the value of love and the role of the Holy Spirit.

### **RelationshipBuilding**

The concept of building cordial relationships through practical demonstrations of love is critical to church planting among the Muslims. Among the scholars who addressed this subject in my literature are- Livingstone, Marsh, Lull, Cate, and Parshall. The fundamental truth that runs across these writers is the invaluable significance of love as a tool to bridge the gap between Muslims and Christians. This is vital because the Muslims have a different perspective about God's love for humanity.

This made Lull, the first missionary to the Muslims, conclude on his visit to Tunis that Islam is a loveless religion. Livingstone argues that the demonstration of love

by Christians will challenge Muslims to embrace the Christian faith. The leadership of ECWA and other churches need to rise to their feet and prayerfully identify key felt needs of the community such as- health centers, setting up pipe- borne waters, and establishment of schools with basic scholarship provided for needy students.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT**

##### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter sheds light on the dynamics of the project in the light of the purpose statement. This is followed by the three research questions guiding this work that aligns with the purpose statement for this study. The specific instruments that I used to collect data for these research questions are mentioned. I also discuss the key demographic characteristic of my ministry. vividly open the mind of the contemporarayreaders to the key demographic characteristics of his ministry context. The study then gives a vivid description of the participants, alongside the criteria used to identify them in facilitating the project. The confidentiality and anonymity of these participants were assured with the use of a designed consent form. In order to facilitate the data collection, two researcher- designed instruments were used that aligned with the specific interview questions for the respondents. The reliability and validity of this project were intentionally ensured in this work. Finally, data collection and analysis constituted this project, which will facilitate the repetition of this project by other researchers.

### **Nature and Purpose of the Project**

The project was a Qualitative study, designed to identify the best practices of church planting methods in the predominantly Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This was key because church planting in a Muslim majority nation requires intentional effective strategies, if healthy indigenous churches are to be planted in that given ministry context. The need to identify the best practices of church planting was against the background of the challenges which generally characterize church planting in a Muslim majority context. The Literature Review in this project showed that even though Christianity had been in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, for over two hundred years, nevertheless, the percentage of Christians is approximately eight percent. This suggested a wake- up call for pastors to explore the best practices of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim majority context, in response to the missional mandate of reaching the unchurched and unreached subject population of this project.

The purpose of this project was, to identify the best practices for the planting of churches by the Evangelical Church Winning All(ECWA), and other churches in the Muslim majority context of The West Coast Region of The Gambia, in anticipation of establishing healthy indigenous churches in that community.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions aligned with the purpose statement were drawn for this study. Each of these research questions (RQS) addressed a portion of the purpose statement guiding this project. The research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) also corresponded with the designed instruments (semi-structured/ focus group) for this



qualitative study. The administration of twenty- one interview items facilitated data collection and analysis in the light of the purpose statement and research questions which guided this project.

**RQ #1. What are the methods of church planting by the leadership of ECWA and other churches in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia?**

This research question addressed the portion of the purpose statement that dealt with the need to identify the best practices engaged in by the leadership of ECWA and other selected churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. In order to collect data for this research question, I made use of two instruments- semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Subsequently ten interview questions were designed for the former instrument (see Appendix A) while a total of eleven interview questions were designed for the latter as evident in (Appendixes B and C) respectively. Out of the ten items designed for the semi- structured interview, questions one to three in (Appendix A), exactly responded to RQ1.

These first three interview questions in (Appendix A), measured the knowledge of ten ECWA pastors and five pastors from other denominations on the methods of church planting, in a Muslim context. Similarly, out of the interview questions designed for participants in the focus groups, questions 1 and 2 in (appendixes B and C) respectively responded to RQ1 and measured the knowledge of the participants on the current methods of church planting in a Muslim community. Subsequently, the

responses received from the participants in this qualitative and pre-intervention study, greatly shed light on this portion of the research question for the study.

**RQ #2. What are the greatest barriers to the planting of indigenous churches by the leadership of ECW A and other churches in the Muslim communities of The West Coast Region of The Gambia?**

This research question specifically addressed the portion of the purpose statement that dealt with the characteristic challenges of church planting in a Muslim context. In my determination to collect data from my participants for this research question, I also made use of two instruments namely: semi-structured interview and focus group as indicated in RQ1. Among the ten questions designed for the former assessment tool, questions four to six responded to RQ2, and subsequently addressed the knowledge of ten ECWA pastors and five pastors from five other churches (denominations) on the challenges characteristic of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim context.

Similarly, out of the five interview questions for the eight participants in the focus group ( see Appendix B ), questions three and four also responded to RQ2 and addressed the knowledge of the participants from both ECWA and other churches combined. The interview questions from both instruments therefore adequately responded to this research question guiding the study. Subsequently, the responses gained from the interviewee greatly helped answer this specific research question. This is evident from the fact that church planting in a Muslim context is generally posed with barriers that militate against the establishment of healthy indigenous churches in a Muslim community. Subsequently, under the semi structured interview, Question four addressed the barriers of church planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia,

question five pointed out the consequence of these barriers, while question six, reflected on the responses/attitudes of the identified participants to these barriers characteristic of church planting in the targeted population.

**RQ #3. What best practices for church planting within Muslim communities in the Western Division can be drawn from this study of methods and barriers?**

This research question was key to the overarching question that guided this study. Subsequently the respective questions built around this research question reflected on that aspect of the purpose statement pointing out the identification of the best practices of church planting in the Muslim context, of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This therefore demanded the collection of the relevant data appropriate to this research question. The instruments used to collect data for this research question were both semi structured interviews and focus groups. The data collection for the latter was done specifically among pastors from various denominational backgrounds (see Appendix B) and Muslim background believers as evident in Appendix C.

Six items were subsequently designed to help shed light on the research questions. Questions one and two reflected on the methods of church planting in a Muslim context (RQ1), questions three and four reflected on the barriers of church planting (RQ2), while questions 7-10 in (Appendix A), question 5 (Appendix B), and 5-6 (Appendix C) all responded to RQ3 . The respective responses from the individual participants and consensus from the members of the focus groups measured the knowledge and opinions of the interviewee on the methods, barriers and best practices of church planting in a Muslim context.

### **Ministry Context(s)**

The context in which I ministered had distinctive features which helped to give great insight into my project. Firstly, The Gambia is a Muslim majority nation with a population of 1.9 million. Ninety percent of this population are Muslims, two percent traditional believers, while eight percent are Christians. The Mandinka, who are the largest ethnic group in the Gambia, are primarily Muslims and found mainly in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, which is the key focus of this project. The irony is that, even though Christianity is believed to have existed in the West Coast Region of the Gambia for over two hundred years, nevertheless, the percentage of Christians are in the minority. What is key is that, among the percentage of those who are Christians, three percent of them are non- Gambians predominantly from the West Sub Region such as: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia, and Guinea Bissau. The Christians from these nations primarily worship in the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical Churches with a few percentage of them in mainline churches like: Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist.

Two key factors that gave rise to this scenario were as follows: The Gambia is a relatively peaceful and politically stable country in the West Sub Region. Immigrants from other countries like- Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria that were faced with internal unrest in their respective countries viewed The Gambia as a safe haven.

Subsequently, various Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical churches were planted in The Gambia, reflecting the country of origin of the migrants in the Gambia. Prominent among these churches are: Church of Pentecost, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Assemblies of God, Baptist Church, Four Square Church, Deeper Life Church, Dominion Charismatic Renewal and Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA).

Secondly, due to the relative peaceful atmosphere, quite a number of these migrants came in as economic migrants to invest into various types of business. What is distinct about these churches is that, there are indeed very few Christian converts from the Islamic background. Subsequently, congregations are primarily composed of Christians from their home countries and those from other churches within The Gambia.

Ironically, in spite of the fact that the majority of the Christians in the West Coast Region of The Gambia are from the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical churches, the Government of The Gambia actually recognizes the mainline churches (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist) as representative of the Christian body. In fact, the leadership of the Gambia Christian Council which is supposed to be an umbrella Christian body for all churches/Christians in the Gambia, rotates exclusively among the leadership of clergy from among the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist. Whenever an official function in respect of prayers for the nation was to be carried out, the government officials would only call church leaders from these mainline churches to play such roles and none from among church leaders in diaspora.

Out of the eight percent of Christians in the population of The Gambia, five percent of them are primarily from the mainline line churches, namely- Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist, while three percent are diasporic Christians. What is distinct about most of the Christians in these mainline churches is the belief that the Christians and the Muslims in The Gambia are serving the same God. This therefore creates room for closer collaboration and peaceful co-existence among Christians from the mainline churches and Muslims. This is vividly reflected when Muslims and Christians celebrate their respective religious festivals like: 'Tobaski', Ramadan (Muslims), Easter and

Christmas (Christians). These celebrations normally entail exchanges of visits, food and gifts among the Muslims and Christians. This peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians create room for opportunities for church planting in the subject population of this study.

Moreover, evidence exists of syncretic practices prevailing among Christians from Muslim background and those from mainline churches such as- talking to the spirits of the dead in the cemetery, and preparing food for the dead on specific days in the year. A number of Muslim converts practice the art of consulting the Islamic marabouts/sorcerers when they are faced with challenges. This cultural practice is indeed contrary to the basic tenets of faith of the Pentecostal, Evangelical Baptist and Evangelical churches. What is critical is that, in spite of the fact that The Gambia is a predominantly Muslim majority nation, Christians are given opportunity by the government of the day to practice their faith both in churches and in public.

### **Participants**

The need to identify participants for this qualitative research was key, as they immensely contributed in shedding light on the three research questions guiding this project. Their responses to the respective interview questions designed for the selected instruments in this study, generated the relevant data which aligned with both my research questions and purpose statement guiding this study. I intentionally identified different stakeholders in my ministry context, such as: pastors and lay persons from diverse denominational backgrounds. The participants selected were therefore a true reflection of purposive samples.

### **Criteria for Selection**

My twenty years of engagement in ministry in a Muslim dominated context of The Gambia facilitated identification of participants who would help in exploring the project under investigation. The experienced gained during this period of ministry in a Muslim context, alongside my cordial relationship with various stakeholders in the community, immensely helped me in deciding on the appropriate participants for this study.

I intentionally selected ten pastors from the Evangelical Church Wining All (ECWA), five pastors/clergy (one each), from other denominations/churches namely: Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Pentecostal, and Evangelical, eight pastors from various church backgrounds and six (pastors/laypersons) inclusive, who were Muslim background believers.

Generally speaking, these participants were selected based on the following criteria: i. wealth of experience/knowledge on the planting of indigenous churches among Muslims, ii. duration of service in church planting in a Muslim context, iii. personal integrity in life, and iv. geographical location of the participants. These criteria indeed supported the intent of my project previously restated in this chapter. Subsequently, the responses received from the interviewee, helped in answering my research questions and offered great insights on the purpose statement of this study.

In addition to these general criteria, I was also guided by other factors which varied accordingly: firstly, among the ten participants from ECWA Church, two of these respondents served as key informants to the interview questions, by virtue of their status as ECWA co-ordinator and ECWA administrators respectively, while the remaining eight pastors gave written monthly reports on church planting to them. Secondly, participants

selected from the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches, were from the mainline churches which had pioneered church planting in the West Coast Region for over two hundred years in The Gambia. I anticipated getting new insights on church planting in a Muslim context from these identified participants. Moreover, unlike the Pentecostal churches, a greater proportion of the congregation in these mainline churches (Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic), were indigenes. This implied that my engagement with respondents from the latter churches, would generate the needed data in response to the research questions and purpose statement for this study.

Thirdly, I also identified participants from Pentecostal, and Evangelical backgrounds because, the pastors from these denominations/churches were predominantly non- Gambians from other nations in the West Sub region of The Gambia namely- Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone. This therefore opened my eyes to different perspective of church planting methods and barriers experienced by pastors in diaspora in a Muslim majority context.

Finally, the selection of six participants were converts from a Muslim background- greatly helped in giving deeper insight on the research questions for this project. Since these selected pastors/laymen from a Muslim background stood the test of time in the midst of the challenges characteristic of church planting in a Muslim context, the data collected from them greatly enhanced the validity of this study.

Each of them responded to various interview questions which aligned with the research questions. Firstly, each of the ten pastors from ECWA responded to ten items I designed. Secondly, I interviewed five pastors from various denominational backgrounds on a- one -to -one basis, with the same set of ten questions. Thirdly, I brought together eight



pastors from diverse church backgrounds, at a given time and place, in order to respond as a group to five sets of questions. Finally, six pastors/laymen who were Muslim background believers, responded as a group to six interview questions.

### **Description of Participants**

A total of twenty-nine participants predominantly males, from diverse ages, ethnicities, season of life, vocations and educational backgrounds were selected by me for this study. Among these respective participants, only one was female. All the participants were within the age ranges of twenty-five- to sixty years and each of them had spent an average of five to ten years of engagement in church planting in a Muslim environment and a minimum of six years in their respective churches (see Figure 4:3).

In terms of ethnicity, the participants selected were from various ethnic/nationalistic backgrounds. For instance, out of the ten ECWA Pastors selected, seven were Manjagoes and Mandinkas while three were Yorubas from Nigeria. On the other hand, the participants from eight other churches were predominantly non- Gambians from various denominational backgrounds in the West Coast Region of the Gambia. However, the third sets of participants (five in number) were primarily indigenes from the mainline churches (Anglican, Methodist and Catholic) while the remaining two from the (Pentecostal and Evangelical churches) were non- Gambians (one Nigerian and one Sierra Leonean). The fourth set of participants (five in number) were Muslim background believers. They were all indigenes from various denominations.

In terms of vocation, most of the participants from ECWA churches and Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical were bi –vocational. This implied that, as

pastors/church planters they were also teachers/ business men. On the other hand, those from the mainline churches and Muslim background believers were primarily engaged in pastoring/church planting.

Another distinctive feature of the participants engaged in this study was the variety in their level of educational achievement. This was evident from the fact that, while the participants selected from among the mainline churches, Pentecostal and charismatic churches had attended various theological institutions, the majority of those from ECWA churches and Muslim background believers had not been privileged to go through in-depth studies in a given theological institution. On the contrary, they were individuals who had a passion for church planting, and had been exposed to various short-term courses on church planting in my ministry context. Two key characteristics of these participants were, their high level of integrity and passion in fulfilling the Great Commission in the midst of challenges characteristic of church planting in a Muslim context.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The need to identify participants for this qualitative research was key, as they immensely contributed in shedding light on the three research questions guiding this project. Their responses to the respective interview questions designed for the selected instruments in this study, generated the relevant data which aligned with both my research questions and purpose. I intentionally identified different stakeholders in my ministry context, such as: Pastors and lay persons from diverse denominational backgrounds. The participants selected were therefore a true reflection of purposive samples. Prior to conducting both the semi-structured interviews and focus group study, an informed consent letter was sent to the prospective research participants- explaining the purpose of my

research, and seeking their willingness to provide data for the phenomenon under investigation. I assured the interviewees of their anonymity and confidentiality of generated data. Based upon a suitable date, place and time of meeting, I gave the prospective participants the option to sign or not the letter sent to them. Subsequently, the items were administered to the respondents after expressing their consent to be engaged in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

Two instrument were utilized in this project for the collection of data, namely: semi- structured interview protocol and focus group. The phenomenon investigated was accomplished through the qualitative approach. I used open- ended questions for both instruments. Subsequently, the type of questions used for both instruments. These were designed and administered by me to facilitate discussion with the selected participants for each of the instruments used. What is critical is that, in spite of the fact that I designe some questions before meeting the participants, there was room for probing as the respondent answered the specific interview questions.

The first instrument I used was the semi-structured interview. (The questions designed provided a baseline of the respondents' knowledge on both the methods, barriers and best practices of church planting in a Muslim context). The rationale for using this type of instrument was based on the following factors: firstly, the study was based on qualitative research which required the selected participants to tell their stories by expressing their opinions and knowledge on the three research questions.

Secondly, since the questions designed for this instrument were open- ended questions, it created room for me to probe some of the responses from the interviewee there by, making the study and conversation more flexible. Subsequently responses received

from the participants give invaluable insights on the perceptions, knowledge and opinions of church planters in a Muslim context.

Thirdly, the instrument used enabled me to collect data on the research questions from pastors in different churches without being influenced by others in a group setting. Fourthly, the questions designed provided a baseline for the respondents' knowledge on both the methods, barriers and best practices of church planting in a Muslim context.

In the light of this, ten interview questions were designed and administered to the ten selected participants from ECWA, and five participants from different denominational backgrounds. Out of these ten items, questions one through three, were based on the methods of church planting, items four to six, were focused on the barriers of church planting, while the remaining four items were reflected on the best practices of church planting in a Muslim context. All of these items aligned with the three research questions for this study and subsequently the purpose statement (see Appendix A).

This instrument was used for about a period of three months. The ten items were sent through email or where possible delivered in person to the identified fifteen (15) participants. Confirmation of date, time and duration of meeting with these participants was done through telephone conversation. The instrument was eventually conducted in the form of a face-to-face interview, which made recording of raw data and writing field notes possible.

Another type of instrument used to collect data for this study was focus groups. This assessment tool was also based on qualitative research with open-ended questions designed and administered by me. The study was also focused on church planting methods in a Muslim majority context of the Western Division of The Gambia. The rationale for

using this specific instrument was that, this assessment tool, brought together different church planters (pastors)/laypersons to be interviewed over a given problem, through a set of pre- determined questions from me.

This research tool enabled me to find out not just what individual participants said, but what they said as members of a group, and how they responded to the views of other participants (Blundell 25). This subsequently generated richer data compared to each person in the group separately interviewed (Sensing 120). Green et al echoe this fact saying “the uniqueness of a focus group is its ability to generate data based on the synergy of the group” (2003). In the light of this, this instrument was administered to two different groups of participants. The first set of participants were eight pastors from different denominational backgrounds in the West Coast Region of the Gambia. Five items were designed and administered to these identified participants (See appendix B).

This created room for me to collect data which reflected different perspective of church planting method in a Muslim context. This was evident from the fact that the participants responded to the same set of questions in a specific place and time frame. The five items reflected on the three research questions guiding this project. Questions one and two aligned with the first research question (based on methods of church planting), questions three and four reflected on the second research question( based on challenges/barriers of church planting), while question five pointed towards the third research question (based on the best practices of church planting in a Muslim context).

Moreover, six interview items (see Appendix C) were designed and administered specifically participants- (6 Pastors/laymen) who were Muslim background believers

(MBB), from various denominations. This gave the respondents scope for them to share their experiences as a group on the three research questions.

In the light of the six interview questions administered to the selected participants, Q1-Q2 were focused on the current methods of church planting, Q3-Q4 were centered on the barriers characteristics of church planting in a Muslim context, while Q5-Q6 reflected on the best practices of church planting in a Muslim community as evident in- ( Appendix C).

This particular type of instrument (focus group) used both for the eight pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds and six pastors/laymen who were Muslim background believers (MBB), enabled me to discover not just what the respective individuals said, but what they said as members of a group and how they responded to the opinion of others on the given topic under research. The responses from the various respondents were respected but steps were undertaken to keep discussions on track- by ensuring that no single participant monopolized the discussion or remained silent in the course of the interview.

On the whole, the flexibility characteristic of both instruments (semi structured interview and focus group) created room for me to probe into the responses, thereby guaranteeing both the reliability and validity of the study. However, unlike semi- structured interview, the focus group instrument posed a challenge of getting a consensus- by all the selected participants with regard to date, time, place and duration of meeting. The use of email and telephone by me, eventually facilitated the focus group meeting in a specific place and time.

### **Pilot Test or Expert Review (optional)**

I created room for an objective and quality input from three expert reviews in order to help shape the items for the instruments used. A letter was sent to the identified expert reviewers stating the problems, purpose statement, research questions and interview questions for the study.

A protocol was created for them to respond to the interview questions I designed. The need for the instruments/interview questions to be aligned with the purpose statement and Research questions was critical for this project. I underscored invaluable comments from the identified expert reviewers in order to ensure the validity of the study. This eventually facilitated key changes on some poorly worded questions and responses from participants that did not correspond with my purpose statement and research questions for this project

### **Reliability and Validity of Project Design**

The principles of reliability and validity are fundamental cornerstones in any given research. In the light of reliability of the project design, I ensured that the data gathering instruments yielded the same results on repeated trials. This subsequently gave birth to a consistency of responses to the same test on methods of church planting to the same participants after a period of time. In order to ensure this reliability of the instruments used, I intentionally took some practical steps, such as: i. avoiding the use of ambiguous questions in my interview questions, by seeking the assistance of expert reviewers, ii. designing protocols for the identified expert reviewers to respond to the items for participants, and iii. making sure that the consent of participants for an appropriate time and place of interview was guaranteed, before administering the two

instruments for this project. This subsequently provided relevant data for the project. iv. Moreover, I took cognizance of the relationship between the instruments used for the study and my purpose statement /research questions.

In addition to the steps taken in facilitating the reliability of the data generating instruments, I ensured validity of the instrument by making sure that the assessment tools actually measured the intended construct rather than an extraneous variable. I intentionally took the following steps to ensure that my tools for research aligned with my purpose statement and research questions: first, I intentionally distinguished the three research questions from the interview questions of the various instruments used, by ensuring that the items administered to the respective respondents were built around the research questions and purpose statement for this study.

Second, the identification of participants (from ECWA, other churches, and Muslim background believers) was key. They were people of integrity with a high degree of knowledge on church planting methods, barriers and best practices in a Muslim context. Third, with assured confidentiality and privacy of the identified participants, a consensus was agreed upon on a suitable time and environment to conduct interviews on a face-to-face basis. Fourth, the items designed and administered were devoid of complicated words and phrases, which might have caused the test to inadvertently mean a different variable. Fifthly, the engagement of expert reviews who helped to shape the items ensured the validity of the research. Finally, I ensured respondent validation by taking the transcript to the interviewee for feedback on the findings recorded.

Some of the complications that may be discovered if someone else repeats my research are as follows: the challenge of getting suitable participants to engage with the



research questions. Moreover, the unwillingness of getting the participants to make themselves available, if their confidentiality and privacy, are not assured by the researcher. However, with a clear explanation of the purpose of the research and assurance of confidentiality and privacy of the participants, other researchers should be able to find the caliber of people to be interviewed in their ministry context.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was an integral part of my study. It was key in discovering responses both to my research questions and interview items which aligned with the purpose statement of my project. The following steps were used to collect data for this project:

First, with a clear purpose statement and three (3) research questions guiding my study, I designed twenty-one (21) interview questions in which- ten were meant for semi-structured interviews and eleven for two sets of focus groups. These questions helped to answer my three (3) research questions and subsequently reflected on my purpose statement for this project.

Second, I solicited the guidance of three expert reviewers who took an objective look at the purpose statement, research questions and interview questions for my project. Their sincere and honest evaluation greatly shaped the items drawn to accurately align with my research questions and purpose statement for the project. This subsequently ensured the validity of the study.

Third, I then established the needed criteria for the selection of participants who would help generate the relevant data in response to my three research questions for this project. Among the criteria spelt out were as follows: I. The need for the participants to

have a wealth of experience in the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context, ii. the integrity of the participants iii. duration of participants staying in a given church iv. age ranges (25-60 years) v. geographical locations and vi. gender of the participants (see. Figures 4:2 and 3).

Fourth, I identified a total of twenty-nine (29) participants and issued each of them a consent letter- which spelt out relevant details about my project. I subsequently ensured the confidentiality and privacy of my selected participants. Moreover, through a telephone conversation, a suitable time, duration, and place of meeting were agreed with my selected participants. This created room for my respondents to honestly share their life stories thoughts, insights and knowledge based on my research questions and purpose statement. My twenty years as a missionary from Sierra Leone in the Muslim majority nation of the Gambia, greatly facilitated the choice of participants for my study and made it possible for the interviewees to open up to me, during the administration of my interview questions. A total of ten (10) participants (pastors) were selected from ECWA church, nineteen (19) participants (pastors/laymen) collected from other denominations. Fifthly, since my study was a qualitative research and pre-intervention based, geared towards knowing the stories from my selected participants, I intentionally made use of two instruments to collect data that would help answer my research questions. These were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A semi-structured interview was conducted for ten participants from ECWA churches in the West Coast Region (WCR) of the Gambia. Among them two were- the ECWA co-ordinator and Administrator who also serve as ECWA pastors. I administered the same set of questions to five pastors (one participant each), from different denominations namely: Anglican, Methodist, Catholic,

Pentecostal and Evangelical. This was intentionally done with the hope of collecting data from participants with different denominational backgrounds. The data collected from these participants helped to answer my research questions.

In addition to the responses received from the selected interviewee, I also conducted a focus group interview guided by five open-ended items for eight other pastors in which two were selected from ECWA, and the remaining six identified from other churches/denominations in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. I intentionally administered the same instrument with five items among six pastors, specifically indigenous Muslim background believers who worship in different denominational settings. This was done with the intention of generating data from them, based on their wealth of knowledge and experiences on the barriers and best practices of planting indigenous churches in the subject population of this qualitative study. This was key as my study was based on identifying the best practices of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim context. The two instruments used (semi-structured and focus group)- created room for me to intentionally probe the respective responses which enabled the interviewee to shed further light on the given research questions. Fifth, I intentionally collected data for this study primarily through keen listening from participants, periodic probing on responses from the respondents, alongside note taking and recording.

Finally, the data collected was carefully stored and secured in my laptop with password only known to me. The data collected was then transcribed, coded and subsequently analyzed in the light of my three research questions and purpose statement.

The research design chosen for this project was a pre-intervention, based on a qualitative research. This research methodology was quite appropriate to my research

questions, which positively reflected on the type of data generated for this study. This therefore challenged me to select participants who are knowledgeable about the problem under research, and meet the essential criteria in giving the relevant responses to my research questions. Sensing calls such participants “purposive samples” (loc.2272). Merriam also echoes this fact with regard to the calibre of participants (61). This need to be selective with regards the identification of participants in qualitative research is critical. Sensing further underscores the quality of participants engaged. These two principles (purposive samples and the quality of participants)- pointed out by Sensing and Merriam guided the narrowing of my participants for this study to twenty nine (29). Their responses aligned with my research questions for this study. Sensing asserts this fact saying, “data collection and analysis should be appropriate to and driven by the research questions” (loc 2412). Subsequently, the data collected for this study was “richly descriptive” (Merriam 6-8), instead of numbers or statistics characteristic of quantitative studies. The Qualitative method enabled me to listen to the stories of the various respondents and eventually analysed them in the light of the purpose statement and research questions of this project. This created room for me to have a great depth (Sensing loc. 2257) and insight on the best practices of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim context. Subsequently, the analysis of generated data was greatly enhanced. This is critical because, the goal of qualitative research is to discover patterns which emerge from the transcript data. In the course of analysing the data collected for this study, I intentionally discovered patterns and themes which emerged from the generated data in my research.

### **Data Analysis**

In my engagement in a qualitative research on identifying best practices of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim context, the statement of the problem and purpose of this study greatly guided me in coding and analysing the transcript data. Sensing vividly puts it: “always keep in mind that you are preparing data in such a way as to facilitate its use in addressing your projects problem and purpose” (loc.4757). The transcript data from the two instruments (semi structured interview and focus groups) used were therefore analysed and coded in this research. However, the steps taken to analyse the data from the respective instruments slightly varied though with an overlap in some of the principles. The type of statistical analysis used for the former, was ‘content analysis’ while the type of analysis used for the latter, was ‘Frame work analysis’ (Richie and Spencer).

The following steps were taken to analyse the data collected from the participants engaged in semi structured interviews: first, the raw data from the interview conducted was transcribed. I then assigned initials/pseudonyms to each transcript data to ensure confidentiality of interviewee. The transcript data were carefully read over and over, line by line for approximately two weeks, with the primary objective of making sense from the data collected in the light of the purpose statement and research questions for this study. Secondly, with an insight gained from the basic operations of “asking questions and making comparisons” in analyzing data, pointed out by Strauss and Corbin(73), I intentionally looked out for systematic patterns that emerged from the transcript data. This helped me in coding the data by labelling relevant pieces such as:

words, sentences, phrases and sections in the transcript. The phrases and key words repeated in the data were highlighted by coloured highlighters.

The latter was indicative of different codes in the transcript data. This resulted in the emergence of so many different codes in the data. This subsequently helped in organizing, compiling and sorting out my transcript data. Third, I created categories (themes) by bringing several codes together in which the words, phrases, concepts, terms, ideas or events were similar in meaning. I then assigned specific words or, (and) phrases to the respective codes that emerged from the data. The identified codes in data were placed at the margin of my transcript data, and stored in an index with identifiers to facilitate easy accessibility of information (Sensing loc. 4782). I purposefully allowed the data to speak for itself, without giving room to my subjective views. This led to the identification of key themes (categories) that emerged from the transcript. Fourth, these various themes (categories) were subsequently grouped together by deciding which is most important and how they connect to each other in the light of the story line of the study (the purpose statement); which actually integrated the major themes of the study. Fifth, the identified major themes that cut across the ten questions responded to, by each of the fifteen interviewees were coded accordingly as explained earlier under the data analysis heading. The researcher was immensely guided by the three types of coding namely- open, axial, and selective coding characteristic of grounded theory research (Corbin and Strauss (423-24).

In spite of the fact that I made use of two instruments the process used in analysing data for semi- structured interviews was similar to focus groups interview, except for key differences in approach due to the group dynamic characteristics of focus

groups. . I intentionally took the following steps while analyzing the transcript data for focus groups:

First, the data collected from the two focus groups were transcribed immediately after getting the raw data from the participants; in order to avoid ambiguity. Second, like semi structured interviews, the transcript data for both focus groups were read over and over, in order to get an in-depth understanding of the responses from participants without any assumption or bias. Third, I noted the main ideas and phrases which featured repeatedly on a specific item that corresponded with the purpose statement guiding the study. Fourth, I noted the responses from each participant, alongside a consensus on the respective items in both focus groups. Those participants who remained silent but responded through gestures were observed with the help of a moderator.

Fifth, since I conducted more than one focus group study with (pastors/church planters from diverse denominational backgrounds and Muslim background believers), as evident in Appendixes B and C, similar words or phrases on each of the five (5) items in Appendix B, and six (6) items in Appendix C, were identified as key themes. These were subsequently given different codes. Sixth, those similar themes which emerged over and over from the data, across the two focus groups, were grouped into the same category with a different code in the margin of the document.

On the whole the type of statistical analysis used in semi-structured interview indeed gave me an in-depth knowledge of the transcript data from the twenty- nine participants engaged with in the study. In conclusion, those major themes identified and coded from the transcript data of the two instruments for this study (semi-structured and focus group) facilitated the findings for this study in Chapter four (4).

The type of statistical analysis used for focus groups was a combination of “constant comparison analysis” (73)- by Corbin and Strauss then Ritche and Spencer’s “frame work analysis” (657). The latter involves five stages namely: familiarization, identifying a thematic frame work, indexing, charting, mapping and interpreting (657). What was critical in the different types of statistical analysis used for both instruments in this study was identification of certain key principles /ideas which cuts across the various methods of statistical analysis.

With regards to the model of narrative used for the study, I engaged with the writings of different scholars like- Sensing, Moschella, Merriam, and John W. Creswell. Though I discovered some helpful insights on data analysis from the respective scholars, however, the model of narrative analysis outlined by Moschella, proved to be most helpful to me in my study. She pointed out three ways the researcher should engage with the transcript data namely: “literal reading”, “interpretive reading,” and “reflexive reading”. According to her, “literal reading”- ensures the investigator to highlight particular words, phrases, language and gestures, “interpretive”- reading of the data, makes it possible for the researcher to organize the document in accordance to the meanings which emerges from the data, whiles the “reflexive”- reading of the data engages the mind of the investigator to come out with his understanding of the data in the light of the purpose statement of the study (172-73). This approach to narrative analysis of data greatly helped me to gain an in-depth and intimate knowledge of the transcript data from both instruments used in this study. This subsequently created room for my findings in Chapter 4.



## CHAPTER 4

### EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter sheds light on the demography of the participants recruited for this study. Details of their responses are illustrated through the help of three charts (a bar chart, a pie chart, and a tabular representation). Their various representations are illustrative of: the number of participants from various churches, the percentage of participants recruited from different geographical locations in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, and the demography of respondents in terms of age, gender, marital status and number of years involved in church planting respectively. This chapter also points out the evidences discovered by me in the field, in response to the three research questions guiding this project<sup>1</sup>.

A statistical analysis of the analysed and coded data, reflective of the findings on the three research questions for this study is shown. The qualitative nature of this project provide the platform for an in-depth description of the findings. Moreover, the evidences discovered were supported by citing key quotations from the respondents- that were recorded during the administration of the items designed for this qualitative study. In the light of this, a bar chart depicting the summary of the best practices of church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia is illustrated. Finally, a summary of the major findings reflective of the research questions underlining this study is given in the light of the problem and purpose statement guiding this work.

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<sup>1</sup>These are discussed in details later in the work

The problem that spurred me in undertaking this project was that, even though Christianity had been in the West Coast Region of the Gambia for over five hundred years, nevertheless, out of a population of about two million, only eight percent of the population are Christians, while about ninety percent of the population are Muslims, and two percent of the population are traditional believers. Ironically, a greater majority of the pastors engaged in church planting are non-Gambians- predominantly from countries in the West African Sub-Region namely- Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria.

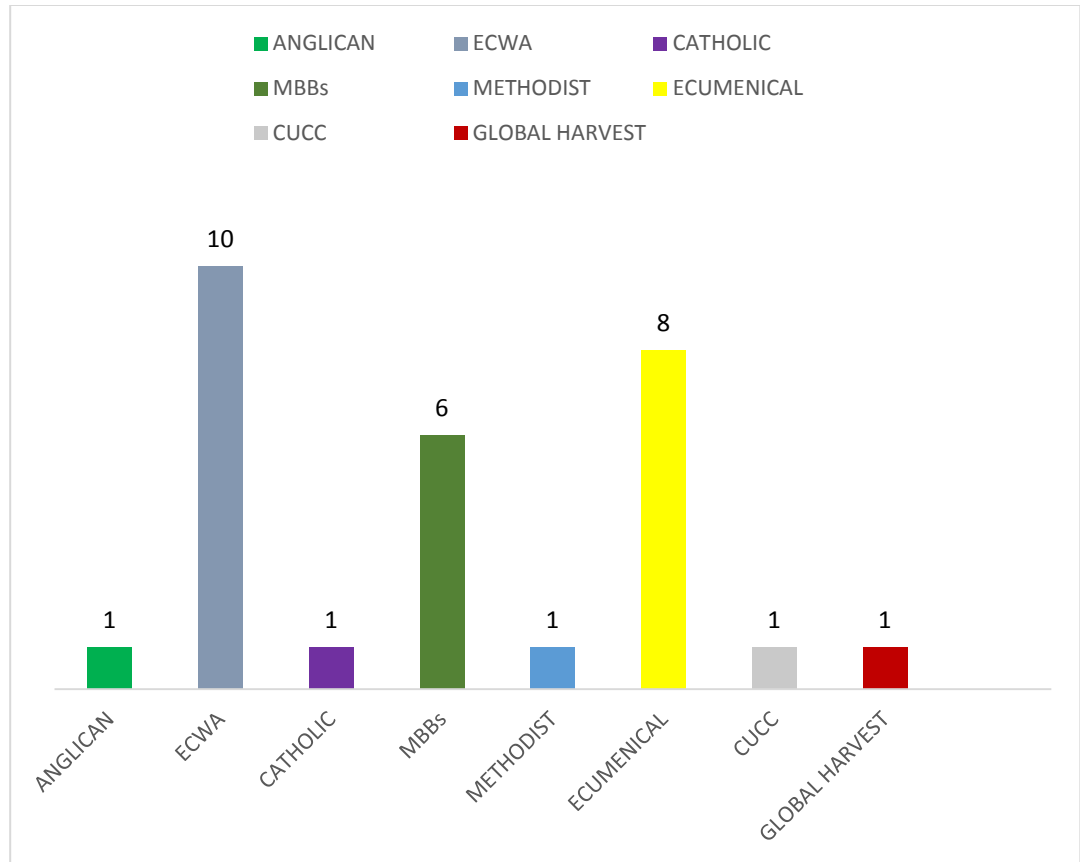
Subsequently, the need to plant indigenous churches in the Muslim majority nation of The Gambia posed a hindrance. Instead of reaching the unreached groups among the Muslims, the evangelistic activities of most pastors or church planters in The Gambia, resulted in believers moving from one church/denomination to another. This was “transfer growth” and not “church planting”. In the light of this problem associated with church planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, this study was intentionally guided by the purpose statement below:

“to identify the best practices of church planting by the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and other churches within the Muslim communities in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, with the hope of seeing more indigenous churches planted in this area”.

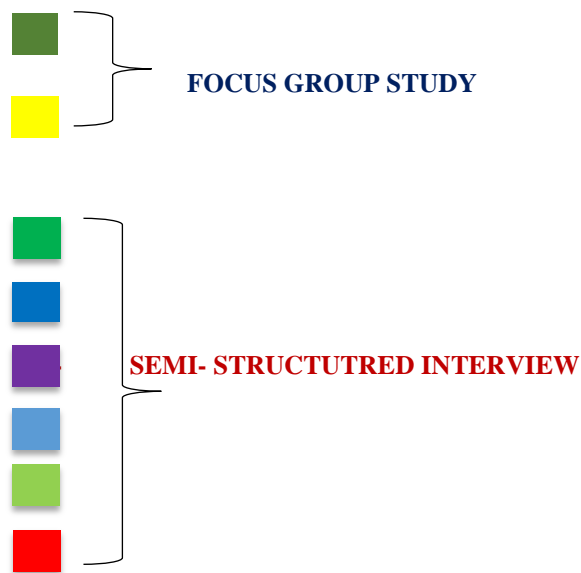
### **Participants**

Twenty-nine participants from diverse denominational backgrounds were recruited for this study (see Figure 4-1 below). Selection of these participants were based on three criteria: (i).duration of engagement in church planting among the Muslims (ii).number of churches planted in a given ministry context and (iii).gender of the

participants. Subsequently, I intentionally engaged with ten participants from ECWA churches, through semi structured interviews and one participant each from the following churches/denomination- Calvary United Community Church, Global Harvest Ministry, Methodist Church, Anglican Church, and Roman Catholic Church, through the same instrument used for ECWA churches. Moreover, eight participants from various church backgrounds were engaged with, through focus group study. Six Muslim background believers from the Evangelical Church of The Gambia (ECG) were engaged with through the same instrument used for the former research participants. This was done with the view of getting different perspectives on church planting methods in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of the Gambia. The demography of the participants and denominational backgrounds is evident in the chart below. A closer look at the bar chart in this work illustrates the fact that, two sets of focus group studies were done among six Muslim background believers and another set among eight pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds (ecumenical). A semi structured interview was also conducted among ten pastors from ECWA church and one pastor each from five other denominations. Each of the participants and respective instruments used are illustrated by different colours as shown in Figure 4.1.

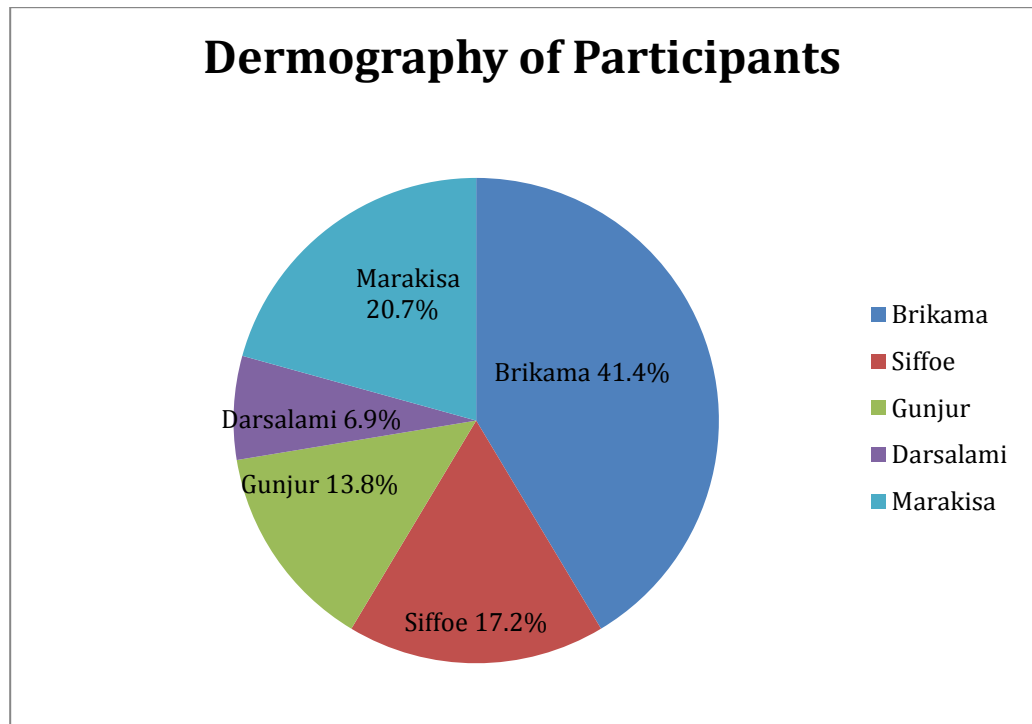


**Figure 4.1. Bar chart on semi-structured and focus group interview responses from 29 participants in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.**



Moreover, these twenty-nine research participants were recruited from various locations within the West Coast Region of The Gambia in order to get a broad representation of respondents for this study as shown below in figure 4.2. Among them, 41.4 percent were recruited from Brikama, the divisional headquarter of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, 20.7 percent from Marakisa, 17.2 percent from Siffoe, 13.8 percent from Gunjur and 6.9 percent from Darsalami.

A greater percentage of participants were recruited from Brikama because, it is the Divisional headquarters of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, and thus, more accessible. More churches were located in the town as opposed to the villages of the West Coast Region such as- Siffoe, Gunjur and Darsalami. This pointed to the attractive model of church planting, with emphasis on the towns- instead of the unreached communities. Moreover, due to the greater percentage of Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, a greater proportion of these geographical locations in WCR, were unreached and unchurched- even though Christianity had been in The Gambia for over five hundred years.



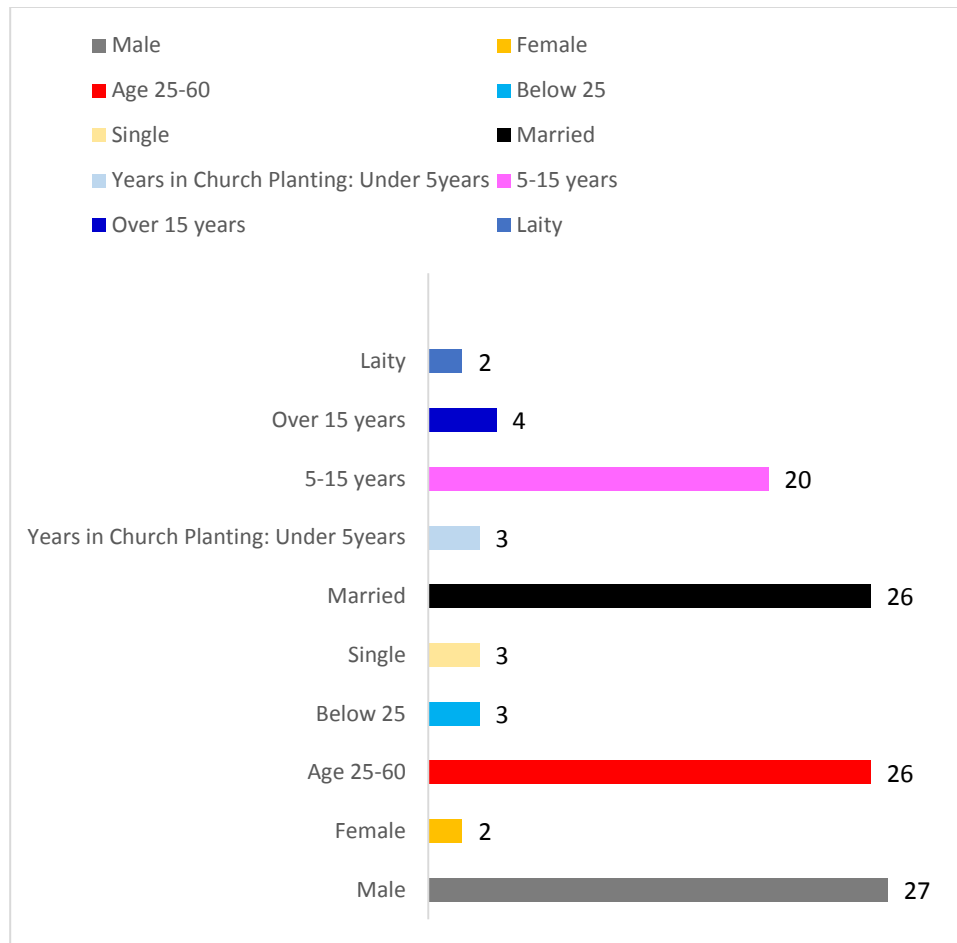
**Figure 4. 2. The Demography and percentage of Participants per geographical locations**

The demography of participants engaged in this study also indicated that more men were recruited as participants within the ages of twenty five to sixty than women. This increased number of interviewees selected from the men was not on account of educational attainment but years of experience in church planting as evident in Figure 4.3.

A key reason for this scenario is the fact that the culture of the Gambia places emphasis on men as Pastors or Church planters than women. This is compounded by the

fact that, in ECWA, women are not elected to the position of Elders/Pastors of the churches but predominantly as members. The same seems to be true for women from some other denominational backgrounds.

A closer study of the chart in figure 4:3 indicate the number of respondents recruited in four categories. These were- the laity as opposed to the pastors, the marital status of the respondents, the various age groups of the respondents and the gender of the respondents. In the light of this, two lay people were engaged among the respondents, while twenty-seven pastors/clergy were recruited for this study. Among these pastors, four had spent over fifteen years in church planting; twenty of them had spent five to fifteen years, while only three had spent under fifteen years in church planting. In terms of marital status, twenty-six of the interviewees were married, while three of them were single. Finally, in terms of gender, twenty-seven of the interviewees were male while two were female. The demography of participants therefore pointed towards the quality of participants recruited for this project.



**Figure 4.3. A Bar chart showing duration of church planting experience, marital status, ages, and gender of participants.**



### **Research Question #1: Description of Evidence**

#### **What are the methods of church planting by the leadership of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and other churches in the Muslim communities of the West Coast Region of The Gambia?**

To answer RQ1, a total of seven questions were administered based on two sets of semi-structured interviews and two sets of focus groups studies. In the light of this, Q1-3(see Appendix A) were based on a semi-structured interview conducted among ten (10) pastors from ECWA, and the same set of questions administered among five (5) pastors from different denominational backgrounds. Q1-2 (see Appendix B), were based on a focus group study administered among eight (8) Pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds; Q1-2 (see Appendix C) were based on a focus group study done among (6) Muslim background believers (MBBs).

What is critical is that the items categorized as Q1 in Appendixes A, B and C measured the current method of church planting which the respective respondents were engaged in while items categorized as Q2 in appendix A measured the impact which that specific church planting method had on the community. On the other hand, Q3 and Q2 in appendixes A and B respectively evaluated the ways in which a given church method contributed to the planting of indigenous churches in that community.

It was observed that, the analysed and coded data from participants' response on Q1, revealed striking similarities and differences in church planting methods engaged in, by the different churches (see Figure 4:4).

On the contrary, the analysed data from the ten interviewees of ECWA ( 001-010), in their responses to Q2 and Q3 (see Appendix A), revealed negative affirmations

from most of the pastors interviewed, except for respondent 004 who gave a positive affirmation to these questions. The pastor in question commented that: “our church in Brikama, planted churches in kloro, Gunjur and Darselami. These churches were placed under the leadership of three indigenous pastors”. One key reason for this positive response, I discovered after probing was that, the church in question was located in the Divisional head quarter of the West Coast Region namely, Brikama as evident in Figure 4:1.

However, the respondents from the nine ECWA churches confirmed that the church planting methods they were engaged in, had not made much impact in their ministry contexts to the extent of planting other indigenous churches in their communities. In the light of this, one of the pastors (002) commented, “we have tried crusade before, but not many people showed face. In typical Muslim communities, they don’t respond to crusades because they don’t want to be identified by others.”

After further probing on this issue he lamented, “What we discovered was that, it was the few Christians that showed their faces on the crusade ground that surrendered their lives to Christ.” Another interviewee (003) in response to Q3 said out rightly, “that is our desire and expectation, though it has not really manifested. Our church has not planted other indigenous churches.” Based on the same question,( 009) replied “not yet, but for the future. However, the congregation has grown in terms of attendance.”

I however observed a contrary response to Q2 and Q3 from pastors of the other denominations engaged with. It was apparent that, 90 percent of these participants interviewed (011-015), confirmed that the current methods of church planting they were

engaged in had made much impact in their respective ministry contexts. They also reported that, they had planted other indigenous churches in different communities.

One of these interviewees (011), in response to Q2 commented, “our church planting method has created much impact because church planting is not about putting up physical structures. Churches can be planted in a house or under a mango tree.

Subsequently, we have planted three churches in the West Coast Region of the Gambia.”

Upon probing further, I discovered that, (011) engaged the Muslim community through a Discovery Bible Study method in which the community was accessed through the identification of a “man of peace” who led them to key influential individuals and subsequently resulted in the planting of churches, out of the Bible Study Group that was set up in that given community.

The validity of these findings from semi-structured interview involving the subjects (011-015) was evident from the responses received in the two sets of focus group studies involving (016-21 and 22-29). These participants recruited in the focus group studies overwhelmingly agreed that, the current methods of church planting they were engaged in, had made great impact in their respective communities.

However, in spite of the diversity in responses to Q1-Q3, by the pastors from the various churches, a closer engagement with the analysed and coded data revealed some common themes and patterns which surfaced in the data. Examples of these themes were as follows: Relationship building, Holistic approach, Contextualization, Discipleship training, one- on -one method, and Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). What was critical was that, each of the themes that emerged in the data pointed towards a specific method of church planting the participants were involved in, as shown below in Table 4:1.

**Table 4:1 Methods of church planting in a muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.**

<b>Methods</b>	<b>Nos.of participants</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
Relationship building	23	79
Holistic approach	18	62
Discovery / Bible Studies	06	21
Discipleship Training	20	68
Contextualization	17	59
Crusades/Film Shows	05	24
One -on –one Evangelism	26	90

**Total number of participants -29**

### **Relationship Building**

In response to RQ1, twenty-three of the participants indicated that, they reached the Muslims in the West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia, through the method of relationship building. Among them, ten were from ECWA and thirteen from the other churches. Upon further probing, these respondents affirmed that, relationship building was a key method they were engaged in to reach the Muslims, as it builds trust between the church planter and the Muslim community, though it demands a lot of patience on the part of the church planter.

In the light of this analysis, one of these participants (010), from ECWA church stated: “Friendship evangelism is very important. I had to sponsor a football tournament in my community for a whole year which provided a platform for me to present the

gospel. Relationship building therefore, requires a lot of patience to realize a meaningful result. It is like planting a seed which you will have to wait to germinate before you harvest.”

Another interviewee (011), from a different denominational background, echoed a similar thought during the conduct of a semi-structured interview. He vividly pointed out, “you can’t just go into a community and start preaching the gospel. You first of all have to establish relationship with the people. The way you relate with them, opens door for them to trust you and open up.”

These points of views given by the two pastors (010 and 011) were shared by all the participants recruited in the two sets of focus groups studies, which involved eight pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds; and four pastors/ two laities from the Muslim background respectively. I was particularly challenged on this theme of relationship building with a statement made by one of the respondents (011) in the focus group study among the eight Pastors. He pointed out:

We do a lot of relationship building especially in a Muslim context. They need to know you and trust you. There is a need to establish relationship with them on a one-to-one basis. They know about Jesus (Isa) in the Qur’an, but they want to know if what they know about Jesus reflects in your life. Through relationship building, I was able to invite some of them to my prayer meetings in the church and they started coming.

The validity of this statement was evident from the focus group study I conducted among four pastors and two lay persons of Muslim background. I noted that all the respondents from the two sets of focus group study clearly indicated, the need for

relationship building as a bridge in reaching the Muslims. One of the Pastors among the Muslim background believers (023) underscored this fact, saying:

We are using one- to - one relationship to win converts. We also open our homes to welcome Muslims who are going to school or learning skill training. As they stay with us, we eat and do things together in common and we allow them to observe how Christians live. Most of the people who eventually made decisions to come to Christ did so through relationship building between Christians and Muslims without being pressurized to come to Christ.

In summary, evidences of relationship building mentioned both in the semi-structured interview and the two sets of focus group studies authenticated the validity of this finding. Subsequently, the responses described show that, most of the respondents among the pastors from ECWA and pastors from other churches, with Muslim background believing pastors inclusive, subscribed to the view that, relationship building was key in reaching the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. On the contrary, the remaining six pastors subscribed to the view that, even though relationship building is critical for reaching the Muslims, they pointed out that, the Muslims are generally difficult to trust due to the prejudice they have developed about Christianity. Moreover, this approach demanded a lot of patience which they needed to pray that God actually gives them that grace to do so.

Moreover, in the course of analyzing and coding the transcribed data, two sub themes to relationship building emerged. These were table fellowship and love. Each of these sub-themes fostered relationship building among Muslims in one way or the

other. This is evident from the discussion below on both “table fellowship” and “Demonstration of love.”

### **Table Fellowship**

The art of sharing meal together from a single dish served as a platform to foster intimate relationship among Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The respondents were further questioned regarding the issues that strengthens relationship - building between the church planter and the indigenes they engaged with in the course of sharing the gospel. In response to this question, the three groups of interviewees in this study namely: pastors from ECWA churches, pastors from other churches/denominations and pastors who were exclusively Muslim background believers, were in agreement with the fact that table fellowship with the Muslims fosters a healthy relationship between the church planter and the indigenes in that given community.

One of the pastors (001) illustrated an incident to shed light on the significance of table fellowship. He said, “on arrival in a certain Muslim community we were invited to eat along with the indigenes, but my friend kept asking them about the type of food that was served. I signaled him not to ask such a question, but he continued. I however responded to the invitation without asking questions. That really opened door for me to reach to the people in that community.”

### **Demonstration of Love**

One can hardly isolate relationship from love. Most of the respondents among the ECWA pastors and those recruited from other churches, for semi- structured

interview and focus group study, clearly pointed out that the art of showing love to the Muslims was critical in winning over their hearts to the Christian faith.

All the Muslim background participants engaged in a focus group study, acknowledged the fact that they embraced the Christian faith primarily due to the demonstration of love received from Christians at the rehabilitation center- (House of Wisdom)-for Muslim background believers. One of them a female, boldly asserted, “I was challenged by the demonstration of practical love shown to me and seen among Christians which I have never experienced among Muslims or have seen demonstrated between the Imam and the Muslim community.”

However, few of the respondents who did not subscribe to the view of how love could win over the Muslim to Christ expressed that, Muslims are generally very difficult to relate with no matter the extent of love shown to them. They pointed out that, it only takes the Grace of God to get them converted to the Christian faith; because of the preconceived ideas they had developed about the Bible and Christianity.

### **Holistic Approach**

Another theme which surfaced in the analysed data as a method of church planting that participants engaged in was the holistic approach.

The findings revealed that only eighteen of the recruited participants were engaged in this method of church planting among the Muslims in West River Region of The Gambia. None of these participants were from ECWA Churches. The ten ECWA pastors (001-010) and (015) from another church affirmed that they were not involved in the holistic approach to Church planting, but had it down on paper as an integral part of their ten years strategic plans. On the contrary, most of the pastors from other



denominational backgrounds engaged with, through semi-structured interviews and the two sets of focus groups studies, confirmed their involvement in a holistic approach of church planting method. This is evident from figure 4:4 indicating eighteen pastors who reported using the holistic method as an approach in church planting among the Muslims. I was greatly challenged on the responses made by two of these pastors (013,014) at a semi-structured interview and another one (023) from a Muslim background at a focus group study. The following quotes reflected their thoughts. One of these respondents (013) stated, “We believe that Jesus came to make the human being whole, thereby ensuring the total liberation of humanity. Therefore, as a church, our schools, dental/medical facilities, and agricultural projects are all done within the social platform of the Gospel.”

Another pastor (014) who shared a similar view with (013) stated: “The whole issue of mission is not just centered on teaching the word but provision of enlightenment and healing through the establishment of educational facilities and clinics respectively. One of our Priests who lived in a village, Kunkujan, for thirty years, provided solar system in the community and job opportunities through the schools established.”

Similarly, (023) a Muslim background believer, gave a vivid picture of the need for a wholistic approach of church planting. He stated:

As a Muslim convert, you experience a complete social and economic isolation from the community. I therefore established the House of Wisdom center since 2003, not only to get the Muslim converts rooted in their new- found faith, through discipleship programmes but for the center to serve as a platform for accommodation facility and a

tailoring workshop. This therefore made it possible for those who are vulnerable to get accommodation and learn skills that will make them productive in the society.

Though these findings indicated much support in favour of meeting the felt needs of Muslim converts isolated by families and the community, nevertheless, I observed that a few of the respondents in the focus groups study differed in this approach to church planting methods. They argued that, the gospel should not be presented initially as a social gospel in meeting the felt needs of the recipients of the Gospel, but first and foremost, to win over the souls of people from the kingdom of darkness to the marvelous light of Jesus Christ. One of the respondents (012) in support of this view maintained that:

Even if you have money don't start presenting the gospel by meeting social needs of the community as a bait. It is possible that, when your financial resources are exhausted, some of the beneficiaries will return to their Islamic practices. Alternatively, plant the word of God in them first, so that when they get rooted in the word, they will stand the test of time and you could then minister to their educational and material needs.

In the light of this, the respondent (012), made mention of an incident whereby a Korean missionary who had resided in a Muslim community in Brikama, spent a lot of financial resources in establishing a residential educational institution in the late 70's; that provided 100 percent scholarship covering: food, tuition and accommodation for Muslim background believers. Upon further probing, he reported that some of the parents cautioned their children saying: "we like the education you are receiving in Canaan Institute, but that of your Jesus, don't bring Him to our house."

This point of view was also driven home by (013) at a focus group study with pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds. He pointed out: “Unfortunately in the West Coast Region a lot of the people think that when you come as a missionary you are coming as a social worker/philanthropist. Subsequently, when you begin to do that, they will identify with you to get from you. When your philanthropic aid is no more, they shift away from you.”

### **Discovery Bible Studies**

Six pastors indicated that the method of church planting they were engaged in was Discovery Bible Studies. In response to my question, as to why they engaged the community through this method, each of them affirmed that, one can hardly enter a Muslim community to share the gospel without identifying a “person of peace” who knows the environment and is able to lead the church planter/missionary to the chief (Alkalo) and other key influential persons in the community.

Among the six interviewees, one of them clearly pointed out that, with the assistance of the “person of peace”, he organized a Bible study under a tree where few people came around to discuss life challenging topics and drew out relevant Christian ethics/principles of life from those topics. Upon further probing, I discovered that those who initially responded to the invitation of Discovery Bible Method were further trained and equipped to go and do likewise, in other parts of the community. This approach subsequently led to the planting of other indigenous churches with membership that varied from five to ten people who assembled either under a tree or in the homes of one of the influential members that was reached through the assistance given by the “person of peace”.

Echoing the same thought, another participant shed light on the criteria of identifying a “person of peace” in a given community. He underscored the fact that, whosoever that was identified as the ‘person of peace,’ does not necessarily have to be a Christian, wealthy person or highly educated person but could be any influential person who understands the culture of the community, irrespective of the person’s religious, educational or financial background. For example 005 stated that, “through the assistance of the person of peace. I discovered from the Alkalo in Bantanima that, the Mennonite had lived in that community for twenty years but did not plant a church.”

In underscoring the significance of the person of peace, he also reported,

During my arrival in Bantanima village, two people from Mennonite and Catholic backgrounds respectively, introduced me to the Alkalo. This opened door for me to start a Bible study with ten people who were exclusively from Mennonite and Catholic backgrounds. The Bible Study Group eventually developed into a Church. Within a period of three months, the attendance of the newly planted church increased to forty people.

This rapid numerical growth of the church in a Muslim community demonstrated the picture of “transfer growth” and not “church planting” that is focused on reaching the Muslims. The validity of this finding was re-echoed by 013 at a focus group study. He clarified, “some of the villages mentioned in your outreach strategies like Kunkujan are strong Catholic domains and not Muslim communities. It is therefore ironical that, most of the people we reach in some of the communities mentioned during this forum, were either already church goers or engaged in traditional religious practices and not Muslims which this research is focused on addressing”.

In spite of divergent views on this subject matter, there was eventually a consensus among the participants at the focus group study among pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds, that church planters should focus on the unreached people among the Muslims and not people who already belonged to a specific church setting. However, the remaining twenty-three pastors indicated that they were not conversant with the knowledge and skills associated with that approach of church planting though they would desire to put it into practice in near future- if exposed to the opportunity of acquiring the needed knowledge and resource materials. Among these twenty-three pastors, nine of them were from ECWA churches while fourteen were from the other churches.

#### **The use of Crusades/ Film shows**

A closer look at Figure 4:4 reveals that five pastors indicated the use of crusades or film shows as methods of church planting they were engaged in. Among them, three of the pastors from ECWA and two from the other denominations reported that, they reached the Muslims through these methods. The remaining twenty-four participants, who did not share this view, expressed their resentment against the use of crusades or film shows on the grounds that both crusades or film shows attract public attention leading to the gathering of crowd. Among them, one of the respondents (014), vividly pointed out “Islam is a community-based religion with strong family ties. Muslims are therefore generally afraid of associating themselves publicly with Christians, through crusades or film shows, for fear of victimization from families and the Muslim community in general”. Following further probing on this subject matter, he mentioned that, those few Muslims who may be courageous to witness either a crusade or film show,

do so at their own risks and some may end up mocking or disbelieving what they observed either at the crusade ground or film shows- which sometimes results in endless debate on controversial issues like: the divinity of Jesus, coupled with the death and resurrection of Christ.

### **One- on- One Evangelism**

Table 4-1 reveals that, twenty-six of the respondents reported using the one- on- one evangelistic approach of reaching the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The overwhelming positive response on the use of this method indicated that, most of the respondents in ECWA and the other denominations engaged through semi-structured interviews or focus group study were in agreement on the use of the one- on - one method of church planting instead of crusades/film shows. Upon further interrogation on this issue, most of these respondents disclosed that, there was a greater tendency for a Muslim to make a decision of following Christ when approached on a face- to- face basis, than in the form of a group, for fear of intimidation and rejection by those around him. This similarity in view among respondents from semi- structured interviews and the two sets of focus group studies authenticated the validity of this finding.

The remaining three respondents who did not subscribe to this approach of church planting, had a different outlook in respect of the use of the one- on- one method of church planting. They felt that it was Western- oriented with high individualistic tendencies and would therefore not fit in well in a Muslim context which is generally knitted by strong family ties. They argued that, in a circumstance where an individual is converted through the one -on- one approach, there is a tendency that the person may not be courageous enough to attend church services but would remain as an anonymous

believer in the community for quite some time. In the light of this, they expressed the view that the Muslim community could best be reached with the gospel by approaching them in small groups through Discovery Bible Studies, as a reflection of the closely knitted characteristic of Muslim communities in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **Discipleship/ Training Programmes**

In response to Q1 in (Appendixes A, B, and C), twenty of the participants reported that Discipleship training programmes constituted a key method in reaching the unreached people among the Muslim converts in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. In general, all the respondents whose church planting methods resulted in the reproduction of indigenous churches in their ministry contexts, agreed that discipleship and training of Muslim background believers equipped the converts to stand the test of time in their new found faith. Most of the participants engaged with through focus group study of the Muslim background believers (024- 029) and those engaged through semi-structured interviews, affirmed that they were involved in Discipleship and Training programmes, as a method of church planting.

One of the respondents underscored this fact. He said, “I can’t meet two hundred converts at a time for proper discipleship. Out of that number, I have a team of fifteen people that I disciple and they in turn disciple others”. Even though most of these respondents were engaged in some discipleship programmes, nevertheless, the beneficiaries of the trainings were not from Muslim backgrounds. They were rather church goers who had been reached either through any of the following methods: a revival programme in a church setting, discovery Bible method, or an outreach in a given community. In response to Q3, Q8 (see Appendix A), and Q2 (see Appendix B), the

participants engaged confirmed that most of the people in their discipleship programmes were not indigenes from Muslim backgrounds but non-indigenes who had transferred their membership from other churches. Among these respondents, 004 who had spent four years in a Muslim community lamented: “Muslims are difficult to reach. Our church is engaged more with people from Christian backgrounds and not Islamic backgrounds”. The remaining nine pastors who did not indicate their involvement in intentional disciple making among Muslims background believers, were exclusively pastors from ECWA churches. Among the ten Pastors from ECWA, only one reported engaging in a weekly discipleship programme in respect of five of their members who were not from a Muslim background.

### **Contextualization**

. Answers to questions (iii), (ii) and (i) in appendixes A, B, and C respectively, provided data for this theme which surfaced. As I engaged with the analysed data, I discovered patterns which revealed the theme of contextualization. Different elements of contextualization emerged, which pointed towards this theme. Among these elements were: knowledge of local languages of the indigenes, dress code of the church planter, translation of the Bible into local languages, mode of worship, and willingness to live among the indigenes. Subsequently, seventeen of the pastors predominantly from the other churches, indicated that, they had planted indigenous churches comprised of Muslim converts on account of contextualizing the gospel. Among these respondents, only two were ECWA pastors.

All the six participants in the focus group study among Muslim background believers, unanimously agreed that, they engaged the Muslims converts through the



different elements of contextualization pointed out in this project. On the contrary, among the ten ECWA pastors interviewed, only two of them, 005 and 009, acknowledged using two of these elements of contextualization as a tool in reaching out to the Muslims in their ministry contexts. For example, 005 being gifted in speaking four of the local languages, found it easier in communicating the gospel to Muslims from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. He therefore pointed out that, all the members in his church are indigenes, who have planted other indigenous churches in another community namely, Kloro. Another respondent (009) acknowledged using a proclaimer (audio player) in the local languages of the indigenes. He confidently pointed out that, this enabled the indigenes to listen to God's message in their mother tongue and subsequently led to a numerical increase in membership of the Church.

The irony is that even though another respondent (002) in the ECWA church had lived among the indigenes in one of the towns for four years, he could not plant another church due to his inability in speaking any of the local languages. However, two of the participants (014 and 017) from other denominational backgrounds reported that, they engaged the Muslims by intentionally living among them. Upon further investigation, they affirmed that, they had planted other indigenous churches in different communities of the West Coast Region of The Gambia on account of contextualizing the gospel in the midst of the people.

Among these participants, one of them underscored the significance of contextualization. He stated, "the world view of Muslims about Christianity is one of a foreign religion from the Western world. This therefore suggests the need for contextualization as a bridge in communicating the message to Muslims". The remaining

twelve pastors in which eight were from ECWA churches and four from the other churches indicated that, even though, the method of contextualization is key in church planting among the Muslims, nevertheless, the composition of the membership of their churches were predominantly believers from other churches. Subsequently the principles of contextualizing the gospel among Muslims were not practiced by them.

### **Research Question #2: Description of Evidence**

**What are the greatest barriers to the planting of indigenous churches by the leadership of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and other churches in the Muslim communities of the West Coast Region of The Gambia?**

Answers to questions (iv, v, vi) for Semi-structured interview protocol, designed for ECWA and other churches, (see Appendix A), coupled with Q. iii. for the focus group study designed exclusively for pastors from other denominations (see Appendix B), then Q. iii and iv for another focus group study designed for Muslim background believers ( see Appendix C), provided data for this research question.

The qualitative data received from the two semi- structured interviews conducted among pastors from ECWA and other churches, in addition to two focus groups studies administered among pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds, and pastors/lay persons from a Muslim background actually fulfilled the purpose of answering this question.

A closer engagement with the analysed data and code, resulted to the surfacing of key themes and few sub themes, which were identified as barriers/challenges to church planting by the leadership of ECWA and other churches in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of the Gambia. The themes/sub themes were as follows: (i).

Persecutions from families and the Muslim community; (ii). Inappropriate discipleship and training programme; (iii)Inadequate financial/material resources to cater for Muslim background believers- MBBs, (iv). Prejudice/wrong perceptions of both Muslims and Christians for each other (v).. Inappropriate strategy in reaching Muslims (a).pattern of worship, (b) pattern of communication and (c) pattern of architectural design and (vi). Pre-dominance of non-indigenes in church planting.

**Table 4:2 Major Barriers of Church Planting in a Muslim context of the WCR of The Gambia**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Persecution from family/community	29	100
Inappropriate discipleship program	8	28
Inadequate financial/material resources	25	86
Prejudice on Islam/ Christianity	29	100
Inappropriate strategies of contextualization	18	62
a) Pattern of worship		
b) Pattern of communication		
c) Pattern of architectural design		
Pre-dominance of non-indigenes in Church Planting	20	69

Number of participants 29

### **Persecutions from families/ Muslim community**

The respective respondents from ECWA church and other churches engaged with through semi-structured interviews and focus group studies overwhelmingly indicated that, persecutions from families and Muslim community constituted a major hindrance to church planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia (see Table 4.2). Upon further probing at a semi-structured interview, I discovered from one of the pastors (011) that Islam in the West Coast Region of The Gambia is generally practiced in the context of family ties.

This implied that the indigenes do not only pray together in the Mosque but eat together in their homes from a single dish. The recruited participants overwhelmingly affirmed that, the fear of being disconnected from the family bond suggests the reason for repelling the gospel, which in their perception was viewed as a foreign religion. The validity of the data from the ten ECWA pastors who responded to items (iv) and (v) as evident in Appendix A, was confirmed by all the interviewees from the two sets of focus group study conducted in the light of items (iii, iv) found both in appendixes B and C.

Evidence of opinions from the respective interviewees could be seen from the cited quotes/explanations by some of the participants engaged with in this study. For example, one of the respondents (005) said,

At the conversion of a student from the Islamic faith, the parents of the child drove her from their home and stopped paying her school fees; on the grounds that she had brought reproach to her family. The young girl in defense of her new-found faith, was catered for in a hostel built by missionaries, specifically

for the purpose of helping students who were faced with challenges from their parents following conversion to the Christian faith.

Another pastor (006) illustrated an example of a Muslim background believer who gave up his Christian faith due to persecutions from his family and the community. After much probing on this subject matter, he explained how a certain Korean Missionary Group had spent so much on a particular Muslim convert, such as provision of accommodation, feeding, and tuition both for the convert's schooling in The Gambia and further Theological studies outside The Gambia. He further pointed out that, on the completion of study of the Muslim background believer, he was faced with acute persecutions from both family and the community that made him to eventually to give up the Christian faith and return to his former Islamic practices.

On the contrary, 016 narrated the incident of a lady from a Muslim background who gave up her Islamic practices and embraced the Christian faith while she was a student in college. After probing further on this subject, the respondent gave a detailed explanation on the persecutions the new convert encountered both from her family members and her Muslim colleagues on campus which ultimately resulted in her running away from campus.

With keen interest to find out the fate of the student in question, the interviewee mentioned that, the matter ended up in a police station where the girl was eventually allowed to practice her faith according to the laws of The Gambia; as she was twenty-three years old then. She was however, not allowed to continue staying in her family house.

This picture of diverse forms of persecutions from families and the Muslim community was also vividly painted by another pastor (023) who had opened a church and rehabilitation center in response to the needs of Muslim background believers facing persecutions from their families/communities. He out rightly pointed out,

We experience both internal and external persecutions. Internally, pastors from other churches do not embrace our pattern of worship which is contrary to their outlook of what a typical church should look like. Externally, your family members have disowned you, as a lost child in their perspective, who has left the Islamic faith. In my view, this is the most severe persecution where by you are treated as an outsider by your family members and at the same time not fully embraced by the community of faith.

### **Inappropriate Discipleship / Training Programmes**

The responses in Table 4:2 shows that, eight of the pastors interviewed, reported they intentionally engaged converts in discipleship programmes tailored to suit indigenous Muslim background believers. Following further probing on this subject of discipleship, one of these pastors at a semi-structured interview said,

We exist as a ministry among Muslims because of discipleship. It is one thing to lead Muslims to Christ and quite another thing to lead them into Christian maturity, which is best expressed through discipleship that leads to multiplication of churches. We therefore purposefully design Bible study series tailored to meet the needs of Muslim background believers.

Upon further investigation on this subject matter, he pointed out examples of churches that had been planted due to a well-tailored disciple making strategy. This point

of view was driven home by another interviewee from a focus group study, conducted among Muslim background believers. He stated, “In Islam your salvation is based on works while in Christianity salvation depends on what Christ has done for us. If all your good works are tested and weigh heavily, that determines your eternity while in Christianity it is not what you do but what Christ has done for you.”

He pointed out that, the discipleship programmes he had were designed to specifically help Muslim background believers get a clear understanding of their position in Christ, compared to who they were prior to their conversion experience. Upon further probing regarding the composition of his discipleship programme, he explained that- the discipleship programmes were primarily tailored on teachings related to the salvation of the Muslim background believers and the five pillars of Islam namely: Salat (Prayers), Sawm (Fasting), Zakat (Charity), Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca), and Shahada (faith).

Among the remaining twenty one pastors, only five of them mentioned their involvement in a discipleship programme for converts that were church goers and not from Muslim background. The rest of the sixteen pastors reported that they were not engaged in any form of discipleship programme as of then. These findings suggested the low percentage of Muslim converts to the Christian faith in the West Coast Region of The Gambia and a possible reason why most of the churches in that region do not reproduce themselves by planting other indigenous churches in their Muslim communities.

### **Inadequate Financial/Material Resources**

Twenty-five of the Pastors interviewed mentioned that the challenges to catering for the financial/material needs of Muslim converts who may be faced with

persecutions either from their parents or Muslim community in general, was a key factor affecting church planting in the West Coast Region of the Gambia. Among these interviewees, three of them shed further light on this subject matter. These were: 004, 012 and 023.

For instance, respondent 004 commented: “If we can take care of their needs, then the chances are higher that, they can stay with us if disowned by their parents.” After much engagement with him on this issue he further said, “parents can actually withhold the payment of school fees or stop feeding their children from Muslim backgrounds who embrace the Christian faith.” He also indicated that, “If funds are not available from churches to rise to such challenges, the victims will not continue roaming on the street but will be forced to go back to their former Islamic ways of life.”

Another pastor 012, also out rightly said: “If a Muslim convert is sent away by his/her family members and the church doesn’t have the resources to help him/her to stand, the new convert will be forced to go back to his/her Islamic practices.”

I was quite challenged by one of the respondents from a Muslim background (024) during a focus group study who painted a vivid picture of the need for material/rehabilitation centers for Muslim converts. He stated,

As a Muslim background believer, you experience a complete social and economic isolation from both your family and community which demands your key felt needs to be met. If this center had not existed since 2003, where those who are vulnerable could find accommodation and learn basic skills, what could have happened to more than forty people who reside in the center and worship there too? Having been disowned by their relatives and Muslim community, they



may love Jesus but have no choice except to go back to their former way of worship, if no positive step was taken to meet their felt needs.

After Much probing on this subject matter, one of the participants at the focus group study of MBBs, pointed out that, even where funds are available, pastors are not prepared to budget towards Muslim converts for fear of being at loggerheads with the parents/relatives of those individuals who may be victims of persecution on account of their faith in Christ. One of the participants at the focus group study pointed out that, there is generally a peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians in The Gambia, in the spirit of maintaining harmony among the indigenes who are closely knit together by family ties.

To my amazement the remaining four interviewees who did not identify the need of finances/material things as a bottle neck in evangelizing among Muslims, rather emphasized the need to maintain harmony among family ties on the notion that, Christians and Muslims are serving the same God.

### **Prejudice on Islam and Christianity**

All the participants recruited from ECWA church and other churches for the semi-structured interview and respondents for the two sets of focus group studies overwhelmingly agreed that, prejudices and judgmental attitudes which Christians have against Muslims and the latter has against Christianity, constitute a bottle neck in the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia (see Table 4:2). I however observed that, the focus group study conducted among the various pastors recruited for the study, initially revealed conflicting opinions

on this subject, but the participants eventually arrived at a consensus that prejudice posed a key challenge for church planting in a Muslim context.

This finding was validated by all the pastors/lay persons recruited in the focus group study conducted among Muslim background believers. What challenged me was that, the facial expressions, gestures and comments by all the respondents engaged with on the field, attested to this fact. For instance, during a semi-structured interview one of these respondents (004) said, “The world view of Muslims is that, the Bible has been corrupted with different translations. They think Christians are not worshipping the true God. If a member of their family decides to be a Christian, they conclude something is wrong somewhere. They have to fight back at all cost to retrieve the child”.

Similarly, another pastor (013) at a semi-structured interview out rightly said: “a lot of Christians don’t know about Islam and a lot of Muslims don’t know about Christianity, so both of you operate with a wrong preconceived mind. Both sides of the coin (Muslims and Christians) therefore have a prejudiced mind against each other. Once you approach evangelism with a prejudiced mind it does not bring the best result”.

Upon probing to find out what he meant by a prejudiced mind, he replied: It means preconceived ideas that are not necessarily right or wrong. For example, to say all Muslims are terrorists, I think they may be wrong. I have Muslims in my neighborhood that have good characters, humanly speaking. They don’t necessarily share my Christian conviction, but as human beings they are very nice. I wish they can come to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Based on these comments from him, I probed further to find out whether there was a need for church planters/pastors to have background knowledge about the Qur’an-.

In response, he stated, “every preacher /church planter in a Muslim context should have some background knowledge about Islam. The truth of the matter is that, Muslims have been brought up to accept and not question their faith, unlike Christians. You are dealing with two sets of people- one who have concluded and another who wants to learn”.

This point of view was underscored by (023) at a focus group study for MBBs. He stated, “the church in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, is not sensitive enough to know how they are viewed by the Muslims in the community. They have also concluded to be in the minority and that Muslims are difficult to reach”.

### **Lack of Appropriate Strategies in Reaching Muslims**

Eighteen of the interviewees stated that, while the Muslims are very strategic in the spread of the Islamic faith, Christians lack strategic approach in reaching the unreached groups among the Muslims. The findings were arrived at through a semi-structured interview and the two sets of focus group studies conducted among these pastors at different times in different locations. This subsequently confirmed the validity of this finding.

Among the respondents who argued that Christians lack strategy in reaching the Muslims, one of them drove home this point of view. He stated, “Muslims have a specific agenda to put up mosques within every community in the West River Region of The Gambia in respect of vision 2020 mapped out by the government of the day. This is evident by the erection of many mosques in our respective communities”. Muslim fundamentalists/agencies have gone the extra mile to sponsor diverse developmental projects in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, on the condition that, they were given places to put up mosques in that given community.

Upon further interrogation on this subject, he stated, “the strategy of the Muslims is not only to build mosques in different places, but to intentionally marry a lot of women from both Islamic and Christian backgrounds, as a strategy of raising up many children in the Islamic faith during the formative stages of their lives”.

Another pastor drove home the latter point saying, “Muslims purposely engage their children in an Arabic school at the formative stages of their lives in order to ensure that, basic Islamic tenets and beliefs are internalized by the children before they grow into adolescence and adulthood”.

On the contrary, one of the pastors engaged at a focus group study mentioned that, church planting method in the West Coast Region of The Gambia is done primarily targeting the youth and adult population with no emphasis on children`s ministry, unlike the Muslims.

Another element of lack of an inadequate strategy of church planting was pointed out by one of the pastors at a focus group study. He vividly mentioned:

Most of us when we embark upon church planting, we become so ecclesiastical centered with the primary objective of making a name, by getting members for our local assemblies, in spite of denominational backgrounds. It is ironical that most of us don’t intentionally go looking out for indigenes who are Muslims, but most time what we call church members is a collection of Christians from other churches who are gathered in that neighborhood. Moreover, most of the people reached, are not indigenes but non-Gambians living in the diaspora. Subsequently, you will be surprised to note that- by the time the church grows, no

indigene is found among them. This evangelistic activity in my view is not church planting but transfer of membership.

This point of view was underscored by 013. He lamented that, the drive for individual pastors to search for numerical growth in their churches and not spiritual growth of the membership, constitute a major hindrance in actualizing such a collective strategy of reaching the Muslims in the West River Region of The Gambia.

This issue of lack of a strategic approach was also underscored by another Pastor. He stated, “A lot of us don’t strategize very well. Just because a specific method of church planting worked well for us in our country of origin like Ghana, Nigeria or Sierra Leone, it implies it will work well for us in The Gambia. That may not necessarily be true. There is rather the need to take a closer look at a given strategy/method and critically assess its relevance, before it is implemented in a given ministry context” .

Other respondents recruited in the study who did not subscribe to the issue of lack of strategy by the churches, as a bottle neck in reaching the Muslims, pointed out that, “the issue of church planting is not a matter of strategies or being mechanical but calls for spirituality. In their opinion, every form of human strategy has gaps, except the Holy Spirit himself gives such ideas of planting churches in a Muslim majority context” .

### **Dominance of non-Gambians in Church Planting.**

Twenty of the recruited participants reported that, the dominance of non-Gambians in church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia is a key hindrance to the planting of indigenous Churches among the targeted population for this project. Among the respondents who shared this view, seven were from semi-structured interview and thirteen from the two sets of focus group

studies conducted at different times and in different locations as agreed by the interviewees for this study. One of the respondents in the focus group study organized for pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds, painted a very vivid picture of this scenario. He stated:

One of the challenges of Gambian ministry in broad perspective is that, church planting has been dominated by non- Gambians who have come in, with their own cultural perspectives. They have not understood the Gambian context. Subsequently, most of them have been condemning all forms of cultural practices which have caused a lot of people going to the extreme. Moreover, we have had very little indigenous trained ministers. Sadly, the few indigenous trained ministers don't stay in the country but go out in search of better opportunities for ministry.

**Effects of the Dominance of non-Gambians in the Planting of Churches in the Muslim context of WCR**

In probing to find out the effects of the dominance of non-Gambians in church planting, in the Muslim context of the WCR, one of the pastors indicated the following four points:

Firstly, it presented in the minds of the indigenes, a gospel with a Western outlook, as Christianity is generally viewed as a western form of religion. Secondly, it limited the need for communication in the local languages which is critical in reaching the indigenes from Muslim backgrounds. Thirdly, it limited the understanding of the church planters in the light of the prevailing cultural world views of the indigenes in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Finally, it reflected on the unwillingness of most

non-indigenous church planters to live among the indigenes in a given community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. One of the respondents (014) from a focus group study who subscribed to the latter view out rightly pointed:

A Missionary should be ready to stay in the community he communicates the Gospel message to. Most of what we have reflects people coming to a given community, plant a church and go back expecting one person in that community to continue providing leadership for the church that is planted. You should be prepared and willing to stay in the midst of the indigenes, this brings in the whole subject matter of learning their cultures, eating their foods, and learning their languages.

One of the Pastors from ECWA church (001) who shared a similar view with the Pastors from other churches during a focus group study underscored this fact. He stated: “Whether you have a PHD in Church Planting from another country, you can’t do better than an indigene in The Gambia with a certificate in church planting because where he can go you will not go. Where he can stay you will not stay. Moreover, many come they don’t want to stay in the villages, unlike the indigenes who are willing to live in the villages and share their lives and resources with the people they want to reach for Christ”.

Even though the other interviewees did not share similar views with 001 and 014 on the grounds that, non- Gambians engaged in reaching the Muslims could learn the languages and cultures of the targeted people within a given scope of time, nevertheless, the findings revealed that only one of the pastors (002) was a non-Gambian who actually lived in the rural areas among the Muslims. On the contrary, the very few church planters who actually lived in the rural areas among the Muslim populace were Gambians

who could communicate the gospel in the language of their people and had deep insight on the customs and traditions of the people they engaged with.

The remaining nine participants pointed out that, even though the dominance of non- Gambians may pose some challenges in planting indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, nevertheless, the involvement of non- Gambians in church planting cannot be underestimated. Against the background that- a number of the non- indigenes engaged in Church planting are equipped with diverse skills and knowledge on church planting; relevant for reaching the unreached people groups among the Muslims.

In summary, a closer look at Table 4.2 indicated the mindset of various respondents to different forms of challenges that militated against the planting of indigenous churches by ECWA church and other churches in the Muslim majority community of West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia. The diversities in responses, pointed to the fact that- the challenges to church planting in a Muslim context varied from one community to another.

### **Effects of Barriers on Indigenous Church Planting**

Though there were commonalities in percentages in two of the responses as evident in Table 4.2, I was particularly keen to get responses from the recruited pastors on the question, “how barriers of church planting affected indigenous church planting among the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia?” (see Q4, Q5, Q6 and in Appendixes A and B respectively).

The pastors gave wide range of responses to these questions. For example, In response to Q5, there was a consensus among the respondents for both (semi-structured



interview and focus group studies) that, the lack of material and financial resources served as a great bottle neck to the planting and sustainability of indigenous churches. One of these pastors reported that, an indigenous church cannot thrive, if it lacks the financial /material capacity to accommodate Muslim background believers who may be exposed to persecutions and isolation. This picture was further painted by another pastor (005) who said, “Most of the churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, have not grown into the level of sustainability. This is made acute by the fact that, Muslim converts are vulnerable and always look forward to receiving financial/material assistance from the church leadership, rather than they giving to the church leadership”.

There was also an overwhelming response among the recruited participants showing the extent at which persecutions from families and communities could serve as a barrier to church planting as evident in (Table 4.2). This point of view implied that, individuals from Muslim backgrounds would be difficult to reach with the gospel message due to the need of maintaining strong family ties and the fear of facing rejection and isolation from loved ones within the family and the Muslim community at large.

In response to Q4 and Q6 (see Appendix A), it was reported by one of the pastors during a focus group study that, the methods of overcoming the respective challenges in church planting among the Muslims, in the West River Region of The Gambia varied from context to context. Upon further probing on this subject, another pastor in the focus group study indicated that, the diversities in response to challenges were due to the wide range of composition of ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia as shown in Figure 4.2. However, in the light of the barriers faced by different respondents regarding church planting as shown in Table 4.2, the interviewees

for this study indicated different ways they intended overcoming the barriers to church planting in response to Q5, and Q6. See Table 4.3 below.

**Table 4.3 Responses to Overcoming Barriers to Church Planting in WCR**

<b>Types of responses</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
The place of prayer	27	93
The personal life style of the church planter	25	86
Maintenance of friendship and relationship building	29	100
Acquiring knowledge on the customs/beliefs	20	51
Intentionally Evangelize and Disciple Indigenes	28	96
Acquiring knowledge on Islam /Muslim	24	82
Paradigm shift in strategic approach to Muslim	26	89

### **Number of Participants- 29**

A closer look at the above findings, in the light of responses from various pastors/laities to overcoming barriers in church planting among Muslims in WCR, vividly indicated a positive overwhelming determination of the respective respondents, to revisit the current method of church planting they were engaged in before this study. The findings from the table also give an insight to some of the best practices which emerged in the data in response to RQ3 (see Table 4.4).

### **Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**

#### **What best practices for church planting within Muslim communities in the West Coast Region can be drawn from this study of methods and barriers?**

This research question examined the best practices of church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The RQ is key in the light of the purpose statement of this study, which is focused on identify the best practices of church planting in the Muslim context of the WRR. Findings discovered from RQ3, would be of great help to church planters in a Muslim majority context.

Responses from recruited participants for Q 7 and Q 10 (See Appendix A), Q5 (see Appendix B) and Q5 (See Appendix C) provided the basis for a response to RQ3.

Following a closer engagement with the analyzed data on methods and barriers, the categories below surfaced as the best practices of church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia ( See Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4 Responses to the Best Practices of Church Planting in the Muslim context of the WCR**

<b>Best Practices</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Percentages %</b>
Develop Relationship Building	29	100
Appropriate Contextualization	29	100
a) Living in the community		
b) Pattern of worship		
c) Knowledge of local language /Qur'an		
One- on -one Evangelism	27	93
Effective Discipleship/Training	28	97
Effective wholistic approach	24	83
Small group/ Discovery Bible studies	10	34
Dominance of indigenes	26	89

**Number of Participants -29**

**Relationship Building**

The coded data analysis from the two sets of semi-structured interviews and focus groups studies, show the reliability and validity of this finding. Three respondents from each of the instruments used, expressed their views on the fact that, relationship building is critical in planting indigenous churches among the Muslims. Among them were: 001, 012, and 024.

Based on his ten years of experience in church planting, 001 stated, “At my initial engagement with Muslims, I thought organizing crusades will work but I

discovered that, Muslims are afraid to identify with Christianity in public. The best method in my view is friendship and relationship building which will serve as a bridge to reach the Muslims”. Similarly, another pastor (012) who had spent over fifteen years in church planting commented that: “The best method of planting churches is through relationship building. It brings trust and confidence with the people in the community and subsequently serves as a gate way to access the Muslim community.” These points of views were authenticated by a Muslim background believer (025) at a focus group study. She said:

Nobody ever witnessed to me. I was captivated by the cordial human relationship demonstrated among Christians and how they related to me as a Muslim while I stayed with them at the rehabilitation center. I had never experienced such love and human relationship among Muslims nor between the Imam and fellow Muslims. This eventually convinced me to leave the Islamic faith and embrace the Christian faith.

In the light of these responses, all the clergy and laities engaged confirmed that, establishing relationship with Muslims is time consuming and subsequently demands a lot of patience, forbearance and understanding.

### **Adequate Contextualization**

Having received diverse responses on the current methods of church planting as evident in RQ1, coupled with the diverse barriers associated in planting churches in the Muslim context as expressed in RQ2, all the twenty-nine respondents on RQ3, overwhelmingly subscribed to the view that, indigenous church planting among Muslims, is best done on the platform of contextualizing the message. This consensus opinion of all participants from ECWA and those from other churches underscores the fact that

Christianity is generally viewed by the Muslims in the West Coast Region as a Western form of religion.

In the light of this, various sub- themes/elements of contextualization surfaced from my coded data analysis that pointed towards the theme of contextualization. These were as follows: the need for the church planter/missionary to live among the indigenes in a given community, a contextualized pattern of worship, knowledge of local languages and knowledge of the Qur'an/cultural background of the indigenes.

### **Living in the Community**

The twenty- nine respondents recruited were in consensus that, the best approach of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim context of WRR, is for the Missionaries or church planters to actually live among the targeted population, instead of engaging them at a distance. This overwhelmingly positive response from participants from EWCA and all the other churches revealed that, even though majority of the pastors for this study were recruited from the Divisional Headquarters, Brikama (see Figure 4.2), nevertheless, they were in agreement with the other pastors/laity engaged with outside Brikama. One of the pastors from ECWA Church 002 stated: “We must go back to the older method of primary mission work where missionaries stayed in the villages with the people. This enabled them to have a deeper insight into the beliefs and cultural worldviews of the Muslims/indigenes they engaged with”.

Another Pastor (013) from a different church setting underscored this fact during the conduct of the interview with him. He said: “Cultures vary from context to context. In bringing the Gospel you don't just condemn the cultures of the people but enlighten them. I use the cultural things they are engaged in to communicate the Gospel to them.

You can however only do that when you understand the context they are coming from which can best be understood, within the framework of living in the community with them”.

These facts were also driven home by one of the pastors during a focus group study conducted among eight pastors. He clarified,

The issue of contextualization in the West River Region of The Gambia varies from community to community. Being the largest Region in The Gambia, the cultural context for example, in Foni district differs from that of Marakissa, and Brikama. The cultural issues that relate to Foni district, a predominantly Jola settlement, differs from that of Marakissa, which is primarily a Karoninca settlement, while Brikama is a cosmopolitan society with different ethnic groups residing there. This implies that, the issue of contextualization cannot just be generalized in the West River Region of The Gambia but should be viewed in the light of the cultures/beliefs prevailing among a specific ethnic group. This can best be understood in the context of the church planter living among the indigenes he/she is reaching.

### **Pattern of worship**

In spite of conflicting opinions on this subject as revealed in the data, however, ninety percent of the respondents from the two sets of semi structured interviews and focus group studies, affirmed the need for a paradigm shift in the pattern of worship, such as: the worship of God in local forms of music and not necessarily Western music, reading of the Bible in the respective local languages but not exclusively English, dress code in traditional form, not necessarily in coat and tie, and place of worship not limited

to a Western architectural designed building, but could be done under a tree, or a typical home setting. The remaining percentage of participants presented a different outlook on these issues. They pointed out that some of these elements of contextualization, such as forms of music, medium of engaging with the Bible, and place of worship, cannot be generalized. They argued that, some elements of contextualization such as the use of a “proclaimer” in the local languages; is best applicable in the rural- setting where the population is predominantly illiterate.

One of the respondents who was a Muslim background believer, underscored the latter fact during a focus group meeting. He commented, “the church in WCR needs to go back to the early days of Jerusalem. I desire to see the church meeting in small groups in various places like houses and under the mango tree. The church is a living organic body. There should be a representative of Jesus without a building in every place”.

### **Knowledge of Local Language and Qur’an**

Ninety percent of the respondents maintained that, if ECWA and other churches are to make a positive impact on reaching the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, this can best be actualized in the context of communicating the gospel in the local languages of the people and getting a background knowledge of the Quran.

One of the respondents from ECWA churches shed light on the significance of church planters knowing the local languages. He said: “Communicating the message to the Muslims in their local languages, serve as a bridge to win their hearts in understanding and accepting the gospel message. An attempt to make use of an interpreter, would not yield the best result as that person may be translating what the original speaker did not mean”. Few of the participants who differed from this view



argued that, the need to understand the local languages should not be a major barrier to communicating the gospel to the Muslim, as it could be overcome with the use of an interpreter.

On the same note, another respondent from one of the churches outside ECWA commented that getting background knowledge on the cultural world of the Qur'an helps to overcome misunderstandings and prejudices generally associated with sharing the Good News of salvation to the Muslim. It subsequently facilitates reaching the Muslims who have a distorted view of the Bible and the basic tenets of the Christian faith and practices. This point of view was overwhelmingly subscribed to by all the clergies and laities engaged with during this study.

### **One -on-One Evangelism**

In the light of the challenges associated with reaching the Muslims through the form of crusades/film shows, discussed under RQ2, twenty-seven of the recruited participants agreed in response to RQ3 that, personal evangelism/one- on -one Evangelism is one of the best methods of planting churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Responding to the question whether participants had a change in opinion with regard to church planting methods among Muslims, one of the interviewees indicated: “my understanding of church planting has changed. I usually kept long hours reaching the Muslim community through crusades. To my dismay, those who responded to the message were exclusively Christians and church goers and not the unreached among the Muslims. This has therefore changed my perspective on church planting in a Muslim context, leaving me with the conviction that one -on-one evangelism is preferable to crusades”.

Another respondent expressed a similar view justifying the lapses in crusades, in comparison to one- on -one evangelism. He stated, “The way I see crusades in the West Region of The Gambia is that, ninety percent of the people who come to the crusade ground are already church people and the rest of the people are passers-by. Subsequently, when you make an alter call, most of the people that come forward are already church goers. It is like a drama they are setting up”.

The other two participants (003 and 014), however shared a contrary view. They explained that in spite of the advantages associated with one -on- one evangelism, there is still a place periodically for crusades/film shows in reaching the unreached people among the Muslims, if it is well coordinated with prayers, followed by a one- on- one discipleship programme. One of these pastors (003) underscored this fact. He stated, “one -on- one evangelism among the Muslims is more effective; even though we do not rule out crusades, as they are also a great means of evangelism. As a matter of fact, even while a crusade is being held there is still the need for one -on- one discipleship of the new converts”.

### **Effective Discipleship/Training**

Twenty- eight of the respondents strongly agreed that discipleship is one of the best practices in the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of WCR. The overwhelming responses from participants in both semi-structured interview and focus group studies in respect of Q 7 and Q 8 ( see Appendix A), Q 5 (see Appendix B), and Q 5 (see Appendix C), authenticated the reliability and validity of this finding. All the interviewees who subscribed to this view in response to RQ3 pointed out that the discipling of converts is critical to the planting and multiplication of indigenous churches.

One of the respondents at a semi-structured interview painted a vivid picture of this fact. He stated, “we planted a church in Marakissa through intentional discipleship, we have planted ten other indigenous churches in different locations namely: Brikama, Madina Pipe line, Banjokoto, Makumbaya, Jalamba, Nyoffelleh, Kassakunda, Sefo, Berending, Brusubi”.

Another interviewee at a focus group study conducted among Muslim background believers expressed his views based on his fifteen years in church planting among Muslims. He pointed out: “Our discipleship programmes for Muslim converts entail in-depth teachings on the five pillars of Islam in the light of the gospel. If one is unable to uproot these things out of their minds at the formative stages of their Christian faith, they will be confused and might end up leaving the Christian faith. These teachings and mentorship have subsequently given birth to the multiplication of other indigenous churches with membership, predominantly of Muslim background believers in Sukuta, Brikama, Sibanor, and Busumbala”.

### **Holistic Approach**

As evident in Table 4.4, twenty-four participants agreed that, communicating the gospel in a Muslim majority nation can best be done in the context of responding to the spiritual, social, educational and material needs of the people engaged with, in that given community. During the conduct of a semi-structured interview, one of the interviewees affirmed that, “the church does not exist out of the community but is designed to be an integral part of the community, by being contextually relevant to the people they intend reaching with the gospel”.

Another respondent expressed a similar view and reported that, “our mission is engaged in diverse community- based projects like- tree planting, well digging, establishment of health clinics, and educational institutions that cut across the different phases of educational development such as- nursery, primary and secondary education”. He further pointed out that, the holistic approach to church planting they were engaged in, had served as a bridge to communicating the Good News to the unreached groups among the Muslims and the subsequent planting of ten indigenous churches.

This point of view was underscored by a Muslim background believer during a focus group study among Muslim background believers. He stated, “I was excommunicated by my family because of rejecting the Islamic faith. If there was no rehabilitation center like the “house of Wisdom”, which catered to my emotional, spiritual and material needs, I would have gone back to the practice of Islam”. Upon further probing to find out how the holistic approach could result in the planting of indigenous churches, one of the pastors who had spent over fifteen years in church planting indicated that this method of church planting would subsequently lead to the planting of churches in the West Coast Region of the Gambia that are: “self- supporting”, “self- reproducing” and “self- propagating” without necessarily depending upon human or materialistic support from the Western World.

In spite of the fact that a greater proportion of the recruited participants emphasized a church planting model reflective of the total liberation of humanity as evident in Jesus’ mission statement, nevertheless, the remaining five respondents pointed that the foundation for church planting among Muslims should not be based upon a materialistic/social gospel aimed at meeting physical needs of the people. They

argued that, a number of the Muslim converts may not be sincere in their faith but only want the material gifts/blessings from the church planter/mission bodies and not the gift of salvation found in Christ. Among these pastors, one said, “the art of meeting the social and material needs of the unreached should only be done after the Muslim background believer is properly disciplined and not prior to that”.

When asked whether the respondents have developed any change of opinions regarding the methods of church planting among the Muslims (see Q10), most of the pastors/laypersons who had challenges with the previous methods of church planting discussed under RQ2, answered in the affirmative. Three of the pastors among them specifically pointed out the need for a paradigm shift in their approach to church planting such as doing away with crusades.

### **Small Groups/Discovery Bible Study Approach**

In spite of the fact that over eighty percent of the participants agreed that the one-on-one approach of church planting was one of the best practices of church planting as evident in Table 4.4, nevertheless some of the recruited participants maintained that church planting in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia is best done in the context of small groups in various communities. One of these pastors stated that, “Islam is a community - based religion and not individualistic. One can therefore hardly isolate the people from the community through the one-on-one approach which in my view is western oriented”. In response to how Muslims are best reached through the formation of small groups, he explained that key influential people could be invited in small groups and engaged with through a discovery Bible study approach. Based on their findings, they in return will be encouraged to invite other close

friends or relatives of theirs to benefit from the studies which could eventually lead to the conversion of one of the invitees.

### **Strategic Approach**

Twenty- six of the pastors pointed out that the need for pastors to adopt a strategic approach in church planting was one of the best methods to plant churches among the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. In response to the question, “how a strategic approach could lead to the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context,” eight of the pastors at a focus group study overwhelmingly agreed that there needed to be a paradigm shift in the approach to church planting among the Muslims. This point of view was also supported by most of the pastors from ECWA and other churches at a semi-structured interview. Among these respondents, one of the pastors stated, “getting a medical mission team with specialized doctors and good medication in the rural areas of the WCR could be an effective strategy to win the hearts of the Muslims”.

Upon further probing from the same pastor, he pointed out that, “The membership of the medical team could use such platforms in sharing the gospel in the course of dispensing the drugs to the patients. This demonstration of practical love from Christians in a Muslim community could serve as a gateway in reaching the unreached people”.

Similarly, another pastor suggested the need for an ecumenical strategy, whereby, churches maintain their distinctive denominational differences and come under the platform of Gambia Christian Council, to evangelize in a given Muslim community. Upon probing further, he explained that Muslim converts to the faith won through such

collective efforts from various churches could be directed to one of the pastors who is specifically engaged in reaching the Muslims in that community.

This strategic approach of communicating the gospel among the Muslims was also pointed out by the Muslim background believers during a focus group study conducted among six of them. The respective clergies and laities engaged were in consensus of a strategic approach in reaching Muslims. Upon further probing on this subject, they indicated that they intentionally targetted the Muslims and not just any person in the community. In response to how this was done, the following sub-themes surfaced in the analysed data: nature of worship pattern, communication pattern and architectural designs. The findings below were discovered as I engaged the respondents on these strategic sub-themes.

### **Pattern of worship**

The six respondents engaged at the focus group study reported that members of the congregation do not put on shoes during worship time. Moreover, they were seated on a mat with very few chairs for visitors. Both the Hymnals and choruses sang in the church were done in the native language of the congregation with no drumming.

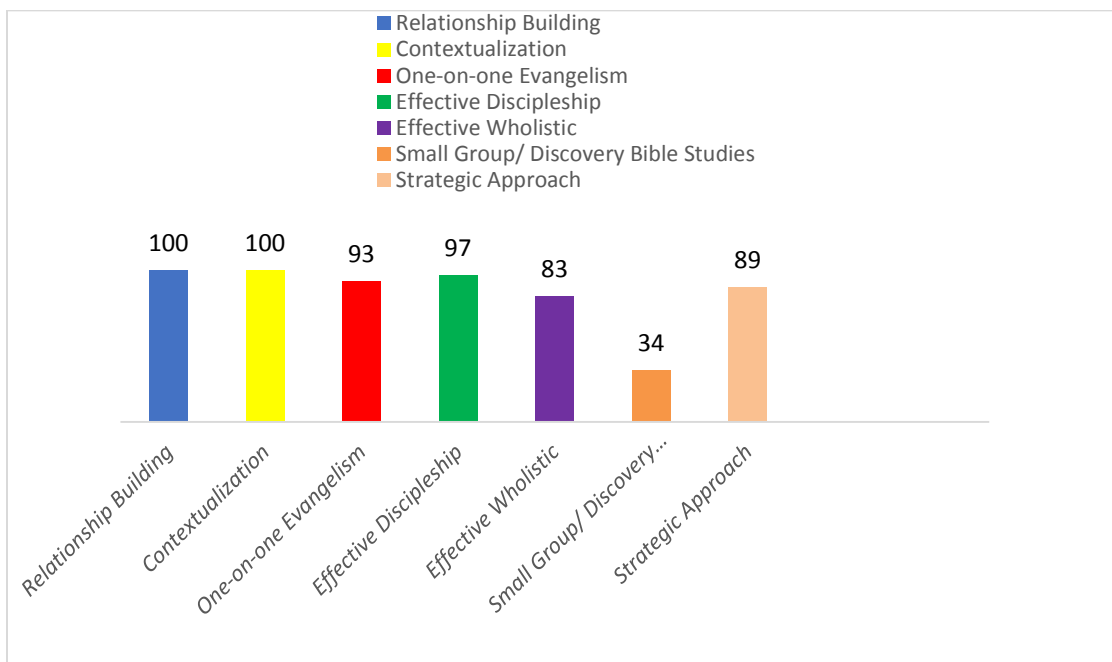
### **Pattern of Communication**

All the six participants in the focus group study designed for Muslim background believers overwhelmingly agreed that the medium of communication during their church services was exclusively one of the local languages, namely Fula. This implied that, the messages from the pastor, readings from the Holy Scriptures, and prayers were all done in the local language. Among them, one of the participants affirmed that she never thought people could communicate with God in any other language besides

Arabic. The extent to which the gospel was contextualized indeed served as a bridge in reaching the Muslim background believers.

**Pattern of Architectural Design**

The recruited participants also affirmed that their place of worship was very strategic as it did not reflect any Western form of building. On the contrary, it reflected the design of the homes of a specific ethnic group namely, the Fulas, whose houses normally takes a round shape. This implied that a Muslim convert could find it easier to fit in such a place of worship without being noticed by the public.



**Figure 4. 4. Chart Showing Percentage Summaries of the Best Practices of Church Planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.**

The chart above (figure 4.4) gives a summarized representation of the best practices of church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia



that was expressed in this project, in Table 4.4. These best practices which emerged in the analysed data are vividly illustrated by the length of the various colored portions on the chart, indicative of the percentage of participants who expressed their views on each of the identified methods of church planting by ECWA and other churches in this qualitative and pre-intervention study.

In the light of this, the chart reveals 100 percent in favour of relationship building and contextualization. Ninety- three percent in favour of one -on-one Evangelism, ninety- seven percent in favour of effective disciple making, eighty-three percent in favour of holistic approach, thirty four percent in favour of Small Groups/Discovery Bible Study approach, and eighty-nine percent in favour of strategic approach. The differences in percentages between Table 4.1 (of RQ1) and Table 4.4/figure 4.4 (of RQ3), pointed out the willingness and determination on the part of the pastors and laities to improve on the current methods of church planting they were engaged in during their responses to items designed for RQ1.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Several major findings surfaced based on the analyzed data and code in this study. They are listed below in summary form and I shed further light on these findings in the next chapter. Principles inherent in these findings could be relevant to other church planters in a Muslim majority context.

- i. ECWA and other churches were at a consensus that the need for the contextualization of the gospel is critical in planting indigenous churches in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

The absence of this created the picture of a Western form of religion in the minds of the recruited respondents.

- ii. ECWA and other churches significantly subscribed to the view that the church planter's background understanding on the cultural world of Islam, vis-à-vis Muslims misconceptions about Christianity and its beliefs, constituted a key challenge to the pastors in the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context. Lack of such knowledge in the Qur'an or the person of Mohammad, created prejudices, confrontational approaches and judgmental attitudes about Islam, which served as a bottle neck in reaching the Muslims. Similarly, the cultural worldview of the Muslims gives a distorted picture of the fundamental Christian beliefs like: the divinity of Jesus, His death and resurrection.
- iii. ECWA and other churches agreed that, the multiplication of indigenous churches in a Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, was a reflection of both the methods of church planting and the discipleship principles used by the church planters in a given ministry context. Lack of a strategic approach to church planting, followed by an intentional discipleship model that is designed for the reproduction of indigenous churches in a Muslim community, presented a picture of an attractive model of church planting, which is best described as "transfer growth" and not planting of indigenous churches.
- iv. ECWA Pastors and others from various denominational backgrounds, affirmed the pre-dominance of non-indigenes in church planting in the West

Coast Region of The Gambia, as a key obstacle to the establishment of indigenous churches in their Muslim majority context. This dominant role of the non-indigenes in their evangelistic drives of reaching the unreached people groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, presented a picture of a Western form of religion, with no cultural relevance in the eyes of the Indigenes. This was suggestive of the negative attitude by the indigenes towards embracing the Christian faith which was considered alien to the culture of the people.

- v. Subjects' responses indicated that a holistic approach to church planting in a Muslim context determined the sustainability of Muslim background believers, thereby resulting in the planting of churches which are- "self-supporting," "selfpropagating," and "self-reproducing." Failing which, Muslim converts may go back to their former ways of lives and missional churches will not be planted in the community. This, therefore, suggested the need for a holistic approach as a bridge to communicating the gospel among the Muslims as it caters for the spiritual, physical, intellectual and material needs of the Muslim background believers.
- vi. ECWA and other churches overwhelmingly agreed that, relationship building in a Muslim majority context of the West Coast Division of The Gambia serves as a bridge to plant indigenous churches in the community. This is evident from the fact that relationship building helps to develop trust and confidence between the church planter and the indigenes. This subsequently

serves as a platform which caused the Muslims to open up in the course of communicating the gospel to them.

- vii. Subjects' responses pointed out that the fear of persecution from families and communities constituted a major barrier to the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This is evident from the fact that, Islam is generally believed to be a community-based religion coupled with the fact that, family members are closely knitted to each other. Subsequently, an attempt for a Muslim to embrace the Christian faith, which is generally believed to be a Western form of religion, attracted negative responses from families and the Muslim communities in general.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

The final chapter of this project addresses the synthesis of the seven major findings discovered in Chapter of this study through the use of three lenses namely: Personal Observation, Literature Review and the Biblical and Theological framework of this project. With regards to personal observation, specific attention is drawn to what I discovered about my targeted population prior, during and after the administration of items for this qualitative study. This is followed by discussion of some ministry implications of the findings, with emphasis on their significance and the extent to which these findings inform the practice of ministry in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

I shed light on five limitations of this study, bringing out how they may affect its generalizability to other geographical locations in my ministry context. This is followed by a discussion of three unexpected observations/surprises found as I engaged with the respondents for this project. Based on my findings in this project, I made nine recommendations that should characterize the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Six suggestions for further studies related to this topic, or on the same topic, are given for prospective researchers and church planters. This chapter ends with a personal reflection (postscript) descriptive of God's Grace and enablement to see me through my academic journey, and new insights gained from the research that will change my ministry among Muslims.

All of these discussions pointed out in this last chapter are critically aligned with the problem and purpose statement of this project. Even though Christianity had

been in the West Coast Region for over two hundred years, nevertheless, out of a population of about two million, only eight percent of the population are Christians, while about ninety percent of the population are Muslims, and two percent of the population are traditional believers. This problem spurred me in undertaking this project, a problem compounded by the fact that, most of the pastors engaged in church planting are not indigenes but non-Gambians. In view of this problem characteristic of church planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, this project was specifically guided by this purpose statement: “to identify the best practices of church planting by the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and other churches within the Muslim communities in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, with the hope of seeing more indigenous churches planted in this area”.

### **Major Findings**

#### **Contextualization of the Gospel, a Bridge in the Planting of Indigenous Churches**

My engagement with the research participants for this study was a great eye opener. This was evident from the fact that, prior to administering the items for this qualitative project, I noticed that, the pastors of ECWA and other churches (see figure.4.1), were engaged in planting churches that took the form of a Western approach, rather than in a contextualized form reflective of indigenous churches. Having worshipped in an ECWA church along with my family for the past six years, I observed with great concern, the dominant role of non- Gambians, particularly Nigerians and Sierra Leoneans in the planting of ECWA churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Subsequently, the leadership of these churches communicated the gospel to a

great extent, reflective of what prevailed either in Nigeria or Sierra Leone which was not applicable to the context in which they ministered.

One primary reason for this scenario was that, ECWA Churches in The Gambia were an off shoot of the mother church of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), based in Jos, Nigeria. This therefore reflected a pattern of church planting of ECWA Churches in The Gambia, that was characteristic of what prevailed in their Nigerian mother church, but not reflective of a church planting method that was culturally relevant to the context of the unreached people groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

I observed that both the National co-ordinator and Church Administrator of ECWA churches in The Gambia were exclusively sent from the mother church in Jos, Nigeria. Those assigned to function in such capacities did so for a period of four years, following which they were recalled to Nigeria at the end of their term, only to be replaced by another set of clergies from the same country, who would settle in the towns and not in the rural areas, where the indigenes predominantly lived. By implication, the need to communicate the gospel in the language of the indigenes and understand their cultural world, posed a great challenge to ECWA pastors in the planting of indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

Similarly, the composition of the congregation that worshipped in ECWA churches located in the urban areas, were not indigenes from a Muslim background, but primarily non- Gambians who have changed their membership from other denominations to the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). This subsequently presented a challenge in communicating the gospel to the targeted population of this study. Moreover, before my intervention, I noted that, the head quarters church of

ECWA and most of its satellite churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia were engaged in a Western style of worship. This was evident from the songs/ hymns and use of Western musical instruments.

Moreover, the medium of communicating the gospel message on Sundays and mid-week services was always expressed English, and not any of the local languages like- Jola, Mandinka or Fula. These descriptions of the church planting pattern of ECWA churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia definitely suggested to me the need for contextualization of the gospel if these churches were to effect life transforming changes among the indigenes who are predominantly from a Muslim background.

I also noticed that the need for contextualization of the gospel message was true not only for ECWA churches, but the other churches engaged with for this project (see.Figure 4.4). Having spent twenty two years in the Gambia as a missionary from Sierra Leone, my personal observation of these other churches reflected a similar picture descriptive of ECWA churches. However, among the churches I engaged with prior to the three months of engaging with my recruited participants, I noted that it was only the pastors of Muslim background (six) and those from other churches (eleven) totalling fifty-nine percent of the total number of participants (twenty-nine) (see Figure 4.4), who contextualized the gospel primarily with the objective of reaching the unreached people group among the Muslims. This was evident from the increased number of Muslim converts with life transforming testimonies in their churches.

During my engagement with the pastors from ECWA and other churches, my initial observation on the need for the contextualization of the gospel in these churches



was affirmed by the interviewees, as evident from the data collected in the course of administering the items to the identified respondents (see Figure 4.4). In the light of this, my respondents expressed the need for a contextualization of the gospel if they were to plant indigenous churches in the Muslim community of The Gambia. One of the ECWA pastors affirmed the significance of understanding and speaking the local language. He lamented: “my inability to communicate in any of the indigenous languages presents a great barrier to the planting of churches among the Muslims, because I am looked upon as an outsider with a foreign gospel. Any attempt to make use of an interpreter has its drawbacks.” Another ECWA pastor indicated:

When I came from Nigeria, I thought organizing a crusade would attract thousands of people. I then organized my first crusade in Barra, which was preceded by much publicity. Ironically, I only got a handful of people who were not Muslims, but Christians from other churches. This has given me a new perspective of church planting in a Muslim context.

Similarly, during the conduct of a focus group study among eight pastors from various denominational backgrounds as indicated in (Figure 4.1) of this study, one of these pastors asserted, “The need to know the local languages and live among the indigenes, creates room for relationship building and subsequently, serve as a bridge to the planting of indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia”.

After three months of my engagement with the twenty-nine participants recruited for this qualitative study, all the respondents affirmed the need for a contextualization of the gospel (see Figure 4.3 and 4) as one of the best practices of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The

Gambia. This overwhelming response illustrated a positive change of attitude of all the interviewees especially the twelve respondents in Figure 4.4 who were initially not engaged in contextualization of the gospel among the Muslims, but primarily reached out to and attracted believers from other churches and not Muslims through the planning of revival programs.

My Literature review in Chapter underscored the need for contextualization of the gospel as a bridge to the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim majority context. Payne (1875), Livingstone (186), Kraft (28, 127), Saal (151) Kato (1217), Hesselgrave and Rommen (200) ushered home this principle of contextualization as a key factor in the planting of indigenous churches. Similarly, Saal echoed this fact saying:

The goal of contextualization is the fulfilment of our Lord's commission as defined in Matt. 28:18-20; Lk. 24:44-49; Jn. 20:21; and Acts.1:8 ; that is, to present the claims of Christ clearly and persuasively, to exhort people to faith in Christ, to teach them to be His disciples and to gather them into churches that are culturally rooted in their society of origin. (151)

Kraft also drove home this fact by looking at contextualization as “the sharing of the Gospel and building of the church in a way that fits the customs and conventions of a particular people group. God chose to reach women and men through their culture and their language. God adapted to Jewish customs and became accessible in a way that Jews could understand the gospel message” (28).

Livingstone concludes “the churches established should be committed to reduce every unnecessary hindrance, both sociological and theological, to the Muslim becoming a follower of Christ and enjoying church life, while realizing that the world will be no

friend to God's people and that suffering is inevitable" (186). In my view, if divinity could reach humanity as stated by Kraft and other missiologists in this project, it is implicit that church planters in the West Coast Region of The Gambia are to contextualize the gospel message, if they are to plant indigenous churches among the Muslims.

The biblical and theological framework in this study, also attest to the need for a contextualization of the gospel as a bridge in planting indigenous churches. In the course of presenting the gospel two thousand years ago, Jesus vividly demonstrated elements of contextualization through the methods used in bridging the gap between the Jewish- Christians and the Samaritans (John 4:1-26). The approach used by Jesus in breaking the wall of partition between the Jewish and Samaritans in the first century, paints a vivid picture in the minds of contemporary readers as to how we could communicate the Gospel to a resistant people group like the Muslims in our respective ministry contexts. Similarly, Apostle Paul, in his determination to positively engage his Gentile world with the gospel, contextualized the message that suited the context he lived in, at a particular time (1Cor.9:19-23; Acts 15:1-5, 22-35). As a pioneer church planter in the first century, he tailored his messages based on his specific audiences like: the Jews (Acts 13:16-41), Greeks (Acts 14:8-20), and Athenians (Acts 17:16-34).

The art of contextualizing the gospel in a Muslim context do serve as a bridge in reaching the unreached people groups among the Muslims. Islam according to the Muslim, is a complete way of life. This is compounded by the fact that the beliefs and practices of Islam, are greatly influenced by the cultural world of the Qur'an which has its roots in the Arab world. It is apparent that, just as Christians have a world view that is

based on the Bible and the beliefs and practices of Christianity, Muslims also have a world view based on their theology. Their worldview and understanding of Allah, their god are based on their scriptures, which are called the Qur'an and the Hadith. The former is believed by the Muslims to be God's final Message or revelation, while the latter describes what Muhammad said and did. This implies that, even though contextualization of the gospel to the Muslim, should not change the authenticity of the gospel, the church planter should intentionally present the gospel in a way that is culturally relevant to the world of Islam and not repels them from embracing the Christian faith.

This is key because Muslims generally speaking, view Christianity as a foreign religion, in the light of the translated versions of the Bible, types of buildings (architectural designs) of churches, dress code of Christians, types of food/meat eaten etc. In the light of these preconceived thoughts about Christianity, contextualizing the message without compromising the truth of the gospel is fundamental to win over the hearts of Muslims for Christ and subsequently facilitate indigenous church planting in a Muslim majority context in an ever-changing world.

### **Misconceptions about the Cultural World of Islam vis -a- vis Christianity and its Beliefs.**

Having lived in the Muslim majority community of The Gambia as a missionary from Sierra Leone for twenty two years, I have been privileged to engage with pastors and church planters not only from ECWA churches, but from other churches like the following: Calvary Community Church, Global Harvest Ministry, Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church and the Methodist Church. A key issue that challenged me

prior to my engagement with the respondents from these various denominational backgrounds was the fact that, even though Christianity had been in The Gambia for about two hundred years, nevertheless, the percentage of Christians in the West Coast Region of The Gambia was barely eight percent of the population, which is actually a key problem which this project is focused on addressing.

I noted that pastors from most of the churches had developed prejudices, preconceive ideas and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. This is suggestive of a pre-mature conclusion that, the Muslims were difficult to reach for Christ. Similarly, I observed that Muslims, who were in the majority, had developed a distorted view about Christianity and its fundamental beliefs such as Jesus' divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection. These two scenarios, in my view, constituted a stumbling block to the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia as indicated in this study. This is suggestive of believers from various church backgrounds and not Muslim converts from the Islamic faith, as had been pointed out in this project.

For example, the first day I visited the divisional headquarters of ECWA church, was at a monthly revival service with a guest preacher from Jos, Nigeria. During the worship time, I observed that the Senior Pastor of the church was a Sierra Leonean, while the members of the congregation were predominantly Sierra Leoneans and Nigerians who had been worshipping in other churches. Like other ECWA church members, I eventually made up my mind to leave the church where I was worshipping, and enrolled with my family in ECWA in the year, 2012. What caught my attention was that, the congregation was composed primarily of families and individuals from various

denominational backgrounds and not a Muslim background which this study was focused on.

This observation was true, not only for ECWA churches, but the other churches engaged with for this study as shown in Figure 4:1. I however observed that pastors of Muslim background believers Believers (MBBs), were exclusively from an Islamic background, prior to conducting interviews with these pastors.

During the course of my interview with the various interviewees recruited for this study, I noted with great concern that, all the twenty-nine respondents actually indicated pastors' misconceptions about Islam vis- a -vis Muslims misconceptions about Christianity as a major barrier to the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia (see Figure 4:4). In the course of probing further on the background to these misconceptions, the respective pastors and laities affirmed that, misconceptions on Muslims were due to their lack of knowledge on the Qur'an and its fundamental Islamic beliefs and practices.

This in my view suggested the reason for prejudiced and judgmental attitudes against Islam by various pastors, making them erroneously conclude that Muslims were difficult to reach. One of the participants attested that, confrontations and arguments with Muslims while communicating the gospel to them were common place. He cited an example of how, he was taken to the police station by some parents as a result of communicating the gospel to a student.

Similarly, I discovered during a focus group study among Muslim background believers, that the majority of Muslims were ignorant not only of the Bible and the beliefs of the Christians, but ironically ignorant of the teachings of Qur'an which is believed to

guide them in their Islamic practices. In view of this, one of the respondents among the Muslim background believers indicated at a focus group study that, most of the Muslims practiced the Islamic faith merely out of compulsion and obedience to family ties with no firm and deeper understanding of the teachings of the Qur'an. I can vividly recall one of the interviewees narrating his experience to me, while he shared the Gospel to an elderly fanatic Muslim man. In response to the Pastor's evangelistic drive, the Muslim fanatic man out rightly said, "I am a 'born' Muslim. It is already too late to be converted to the Christian faith". By implications, no time is devoted by such Muslim fanatics to actually understand the cultural world of the Bible nor the Qur'an".

Such Muslim adherents are therefore left with no option but to accept and not question the teachings of the Qur'an as passed on to them from one generation to another. For example, it takes a Muslim who is knowledgeable in the Qur'an to learn that, Jesus birth, death and resurrection was explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. This fundamental teaching in the Bible is stated in the Quran as follows:" so peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day I shall be raised up to life (again)!" (Surar.19:33).

I noted with great excitement after my three months of engagement with the recruited participants, that the items administered during the semi structured interviews and focus group studies, served as an eye opener to the respective respondents for this qualitative project. The items tested both the knowledge and the attitude of the recruited participants on the best forms of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim context. Subsequently all the participants gave an overwhelming response for a paradigm shift in the negative attitude of pastors and laities to the planting of churches in the Muslim majority context, of the West Coast Division of The Gambia.

My literature review in Chapter pointed out various forms of misconceptions about the cultural world of Islam vis- a- vis Christianity. This was articulated by the following school of thoughts namely: Saal (64-66), Esposito (32), and Green (52-53). Two of the examples of misconceptions pointed out by Michael Green confirming the difficulty for Christians to communicating the gospel to Muslims are as follows:

1. Islam has a different concept of God. To the Christian, God's self-revelation to humanity through Jesus Christ indicates that, man could establish a personal relationship with God (immanent), while Islam hold to the belief that God is transcendent, and as such God is so far away that no personal relationship could be built between man and God.
2. Islam has a very different understanding of Jesus. To the Muslim, Jesus was a prophet of God, but lesser than Mohammed. They believed that He did not die on the cross but taken away to Heaven, while to the Christian Jesus was not just a prophet, but God (52-53).

Similarly, two examples of Muslim beliefs which contradicted the Christian faith as expressed by Saal are as follows:

1. Jesus foretold the coming of Mohammad: the Muslims are convinced that, the promise made by Jesus of sending the Holy Spirit or the Comforter, as they waited in the upper room, was a reference to Mohammad who will come following the departure of Mohammad (Qur'an 61;6 cf. Jh.14:16-17; 25-26 and 16:7-11).
2. Christians are polytheists: Muslims believe that Christians worship three gods: God the Father, Mary and Jesus. However, based on the Qur'an, they are



convinced that there is only one God and not three as evident in the Qur'an:  
(4:171; 5:72-73; 5:115 -116; 112:1-4), (64-66).

A closer look at the examples of misconceptions cited by Green and Saal suggest to me, the challenges involved in communicating the gospel to Muslims and subsequently the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. These misconceptions therefore account for the low percentage of Muslim converts in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, in spite of the existence of Christianity in The Gambia for about five hundred years.

In addition to the respective worldviews of these scholars and missiologists, the Qur'an, also draws the attention of the contemporary reader to key biblical truths misconstrued by the Muslims. For instance, Jesus Christ is the most controversial personality in the Qur'an. He is actually referred to in ninety verses in fifteen Surahs. Islam corroborates that Jesus was born to a virgin, was sinless, performed miracles and was superior to other prophets.

Yet Islam teaches that Jesus was no more than a prophet. It denies the central message of Christianity by denying Jesus' divinity (John. 8:58; 10:30), crucifixion and resurrection, (Matt.16:21). Surah. 4 :157 puts it: "we killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah," but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them...for a surety, they killed Him not". To the Muslim, Jesus was a prophet of God, but lesser than Mohammed. They believed that he did not die on the cross, but taken away to heaven.

Moreover, Islam and Christianity have different conceptions of the Holy Book.

To the Muslim every revelation in the Qur'an is the literal word of God revealed to Mohammad at a cave, in 609 by angel Jibril (Gabriel). While to the Christian, the Bible was written by men from diverse cultural backgrounds with the help of the Holy Spirit.

These various misconceptions between Islam and Christianity revealed in the Qur'an, and argued out by various schools of thoughts inform the Biblical and theological framework of this study. A deeper reflection on the Scriptures reveal that, Muslims are human beings created in the image and likeness of God (Gen1:26-27.) and are definitely part and parcel of God's redemptive plan of salvation for humanity as evident in both the Old Testament and New Testament. For example, a closer study OT Prophecies of the Gentiles coming to Christ (Gen.12:3b, 22:18, 26:4; Ps. 22:27-28; Isa.2:2-3, Isa.1:10; Mal.1:11, foreshadowed church planting in the NT. as a central part and parcel of God's mission to reveal his eternal redemptive plan for mankind (Eph.1:4,9, 11,13-14;2:10; 3:11; 2Tim.2:9 1Pet.2:4-10). These scriptures both in the OT and NT show the heart of our missionary God for the Muslims who are definitely included among the Gentiles.

In the light of the prejudices by pastors and laities with regards to reaching the unreached people group among the Muslims, a change of perspective is definitely needed that aligns with biblical and theological principles guiding this project. This reminds the contemporary reader of God's revelation to Peter in the light of his prejudice against the Gentiles (Acts10:28, 34-35) and Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-29). Like Peter, Jesus was challenged to break the prejudice the Jews held against the Samaritans. Jesus' positive relational strategy broke the wall of partition between the Jews and Samaritans. This enabled him to enter into the world of the Samaritan woman

who was disconnected from the Jewish community. Similarly, pastors of churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia should intentionally and strategically reach out to Muslims with the help of the Holy Spirit. They are definitely an integral part of God's missional mandate from eternity past (Gen.12:1-3; 1 Tim.2:4; 2 Pet.3:9; John 3:16. This therefore underscores the need for a paradigm shift in our theology of church planting among the Muslims.

**Multiplication of Indigenous Churches, a reflection of Church Planting Methods and Discipleship.**

Having served as National Director of an interdenominational organization, namely Scripture Union Ministry, from 2002 -2018 in The Gambia, I have been privileged to engage with pastors from various churches and denominational backgrounds. In the course of my work with Scripture Union, I was also privileged to serve as a pastor of ECWA church from January 2012 to date. My experiences as one of the pastors of ECWA churches, coupled with my engagement with pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds, sharpened my understanding to discover that, the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context, is the product of church planting methods and discipleship. Subsequently, as an ECWA churches, I noted with amazement that, door- to- door evangelism by ECWA pastors, specifically targeted to reach the indigenes from a Muslim background was hardly done.

On the contrary, the leaderships of ECWA churches organized monthly revival programmes, which primarily attracted believers from other churches and not the unreached and disconnected people group among the Muslims. A few attempts made by

ECWA pastors to organize crusades or present film shows in the communities, had failed to give birth to the planting of healthy indigenous churches.

This scenario was compounded by the fact that, those pastors who comprised the core leadership of ECWA churches were mainly Nigerians and Sierra Leoneans and not the indigenous people of The Gambia. Moreover, the pattern of worship in these churches greatly reflected the church planting model in Jos, Nigeria, where the mother church of ECWA was located. Subsequently, prior to my engagement with the research participants for this project, I noted that the composition of the congregation of ECWA churches in the urban areas were made up primarily of non- Gambians, with preaching and worship styles in English, instead of the local languages of the indigenes.

Even though a few of the ECWA satellite churches in the rural areas like: Siffoe, Gunjur, Darsalami and Marakissa (see Figure 4:1) were ran by indigene pastors nevertheless, I discovered prior to this pre-intervention work that, members of the congregation were predominantly Christians from other churches and not Muslim converts. This suggested to me, the absence of a church planting method and discipleship programme in ECWA Churches that was tailored to transform the Muslim community, in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

On the contrary, weekly discipleship programmes were organized in one of the ECWA churches, specifically to ensure the spiritual growth and maturity of Christians who had transferred their membership from other churches, such as: Seventh Day Adventists(SDA), Church of Pentecost and Roman Catholic, to ECWA Churches. This scenario of “transfer growth” and not “church planting” definitely revealed to me that, ECWA churches lacked strategic approaches aimed at intentionally winning over the

hearts of Muslims to Jesus Christ. By implication, they lacked intentional discipleship programmes for Muslim background believers who would be, equipped and empowered to raise other indigenous leaders, who would be instrumental in the planting of indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of the Gambia.

This description of a church planting model characteristic of ECWA churches was true not only for the pastors of ECWA churches, but most of the pastors of the other churches recruited for this study as shown in Figure 4.1. However, the three respondents from the mainline churches- (Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist), and the six respondents representative of pastors of Muslim Background Believers(MBBs) differed in their approaches to CPM, as they were engaged in a church planting strategy that resulted in the multiplication of other indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

During the semi-structured interviews for the ten ECWA pastors, all the respondents attested to the fact that reaching the indigenous Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia with the Gospel of Christ was a difficult task. This was compounded by the method of church planting practised by the leadership of ECWA churches, who were predominantly non- Gambians, a with greater tendency to transporting methods of church planting from their home countries to The Gambia. In the course of engaging with these interviewees, one of them lamented saying:

When I came from Nigeria as a missionary to The Gambia, I thought organizing crusades accompanied by loud musical instruments, would attract thousands of believers and Muslims alike, but to my greatest surprise and disappointment, in spite of every

effort made in terms of publicities, only a handful of people from various church backgrounds showed up at the crusade ground.

Similarly, another respondent from ECWA church pointed out a change of church planting strategy, from crusades to the running of revival programmes, with guest speakers from other nations. In his view, this attracted an overwhelming response from the community. I was however shocked to learn from him that, the positive responses received from the community of faith, were ironically believers who already belonged to various churches and not people from Muslim background. This in my view, was suggestive of an attractional model of church planting that would not lead to the planting of healthy indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. By implication, discipleship programmes designed by these churches, were tailored to reach believers who had transferred their membership from another church to ECWA.

My interview with pastors from the other churches mentioned in this work (see Figure 4.1), showed similar responses as descriptive of ECWA churches. On the contrary, my engagement with the three Priests from the mainline churches ( Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic) and six pastors of Muslim background believers during a semi structured interview and focus group study respectively attested to the fact that, a given method of church planting, alongside a life transforming discipleship training programme, could give birth to the planting of indigenous churches, that would subsequently reproduce other churches in the Muslim majority context. At a focus group study conducted, among pastors of Muslim background believers, one of them vividly asserted:

For us, the methods we are using to win over the hearts of Muslims is working. Our headquarter church has actually discipled six converts from a Muslim background, who have subsequently planted six other indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, with members predominantly from Muslim background.

Even though the three mainline churches (Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic) mentioned in this study reproduce indigenous churches in other parts of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, the data collected from these respondents revealed that the majority of the members of the congregation were not actually from a Muslim background but from a Christian background. Upon probing further, I discovered that, some were people in diaspora who identified themselves with their specific denomination from their country of origin such as: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Ghana, while others were from The Gambia but influenced by a Christian upbringing from their family members in the Muslim community.

However, following the end of my eight weeks engagement with my research participants for this study, data collected indicated a paradigm shift in the approach to the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

I subsequently noted an overwhelming response from all the ECWA pastors and most of the pastors from the other churches, resulting in eighty-nine percent of the total number of respondents with determination to carry out a strategic approach of church planting methodology (See Figure 4.4), focused on reaching Muslims exclusively with the gospel, to be followed by a life transforming Discipleship model, which would

ultimately lead to the reproduction of indigenous churches with emphasis on Muslim converts from my targeted population for this project.

My Literature review in Chapter 2, drives home this tendency of how the method of CPM engaged in, coupled with the requisite discipleship programme subsequently led to the multiplication and planting of other indigenous churches in a given ministry context. This is suggestive of the need to use methods of church planting that are culturally relevant to a given community, with the objective of establishing healthy indigenous churches which could reproduce themselves. This has been echoed by missiologists and biblical scholars like: Livingstone (73), Payne (279-280,304, 306), Viola (27-34, 35-39) and Ed. Stetzer (loc.1943-1963). The latter vividly argued in Chapter 6 of his text saying, “success for a missional church is measured by multiplication of churches, while attractional church measures success in terms of attendance, number of people baptized and programme attended”. As pointed out earlier in Chapter 5, this attractional model of church planting described by Ed Stetzer actually reflected the church planting model of ECWA Churches and most of the other churches pointed out in this project. On the contrary, multiplication and planting of indigenous churches with emphasis on Muslim converts was done primarily by pastors of Muslim background believers (MBBs) exclusively from the Evangelical Church of The Gambia (ECG).

The Biblical and Theological framework of this project strongly revealed that, multiplication of indigenous churches is a product of the method of church planting in a given geographical location. This is evident from the biblical church planting model demonstrated in the apostolic era, by the pioneer church planter Paul, and other apostles. Their obedience to the missional mandate of the church as expressed in (Matt. 24:14-15;



28:18-20 cf. Isaiah 49:6, Rev7:9) vividly attested to this fact. The church as a living organism in the apostolic era, comprised not only of people from Jewish background, but of Greeks and Gentiles who were won over from their ungodly way of life, to that of a transformed life in Christ.

They were not believers who transferred their membership from one church to another, as was characteristic of most churches in this project. On the contrary, they were converts that were initially lost and disconnected from God, but through the Apostles' methods of church planting, were eventually transformed and disciplined to plant other indigenous churches during the apostolic era. I am of the opinion that, the Apostles' church planting pattern, with its emphasis on discipleship, as the bedrock of church multiplication was a key factor that enabled them to positively transform their communities for Christ.

A vivid demonstration of this church planting method was evident in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15; 2:41-42; 4:4; 5:14) and Ephesus (Acts 19:10). For example, during Paul's third missionary journey in Ephesus, Paul established a discipleship training school at Tyrannus (Acts19:10). The growth and maturation of those disciples for two years, subsequently led to the planting of other churches among the Jews and Greeks in Asia Minor.

The church planting pattern characteristic of the Apostles in Jerusalem and of Paul during his three missionary Journeys explored virgin grounds in the early church history. They did not build upon the foundation of others, through transfer of membership from one church to another. The positive impact of transforming their community was best done in the context of strategically and prayerfully reaching out to the lost and

unchurched people group in a given geographical location. This was followed by discipleship building, which subsequently resulted in the multiplication of indigenous churches among the Jews and the Greeks in Jerusalem and Asia Minor respectively.

The theology of church planting by the Apostles in the first century shaped their methods of church planting. In my view, the strategic methods of church planting in the apostolic era were a far cry from what prevailed in ECWA and most of the churches discussed in this qualitative project. This therefore affected the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, and called for the need to identify the best methods of planting indigenous churches in my ministry context.

### **Dominance of Non-indigenes in CPM, a Key Bottleneck to the Establishment of Indigenous Churches**

Having lived and worked in the Gambia with a para-church ministry for almost two decades, I have been privileged to actually interact not only with pastors from ECWA Churches but pastors, priests/clergy from diverse denominational backgrounds. This has given me an enriched and broad perspective of church planting in the population under study. Before administering my interview questions, I noted that out of the eight percent Christians in the Gambia, about eighty percent of those engaged in church planting were non-Gambians who were passionate in obeying the biblical mandate under the umbrella of their respective home churches from nations like: Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone.

While interviewing my recruited participants, all the respondents from the two focus group studies pointed out that, the dominance of non-Gambians in church planting

presented a major barrier to the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. They vividly pointed out that, the dominant role of non-indigenous church planters/pastors had untold effects on the growth and multiplication of indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. They affirmed that, non indigenous pastors were not only faced with language barriers in communicating the unchanging message of salvation, but other forms of barriers were evident in worship and preaching patterns coupled with their unwillingness to live among the indigenes in the unreached areas. Twenty of my research participants indicated that such church planting model, projected a Western form of religion and not indigenous. One of the participants from a focus group study lamented:

Most of us when we embark upon church planting, we become so ecclesiastical centered with the primary objective of making a name, by getting members for our local assemblies, in spite of denominational backgrounds. It is ironical that most of us don't intentionally go looking out for indigenes who are Muslims, but most time what we call church members is a collection of Christians from other churches who are gathered in that neighborhood. Moreover, most of the people reached, are not indigenes but non-Gambians living in the diaspora. Subsequently, you will be surprised to note that, by the time the church grows, no indigene is found among them. This evangelistic activity in my view, is not church planting but transfer of membership.

Another participant underscored this fact saying: "one of the challenges of Gambian ministry in broad perspective is that, church planting has been dominated by none Gambians who have come in, with their own cultural perspectives. They have not understood the Gambian context. Moreover, we have had very little indigenous trained

ministers. Sadly, the few indigenous trained ministers don't stay in the country but go out in search of better opportunities for ministry”.

However, in spite of the diverse church planting setbacks in the West Coast Region of The Gambia that was dominated by non-indigenes, nine of the respondents, predominantly pastors from ECWA lamented the fact that the role of non-indigenous church planters cannot be underestimated. They argued that a number of the non-indigenous church planters have relevant church planting skills and knowledge which could be injected into a given ministry context. This is made explicit in the biblical and theological lens used in this chapter.

After my engagement with these respondents, I discovered an overwhelmingly positive response from the participants evident from the increase in responses from sixty-two percent in (Table 4.2) to eighty-nine percent in (Table 4.4), in response to RQ2 and RQ3 respectively. This underscored the apparent need to getting more indigenous people engaged in church planting in the targeted population of this study. Therefore, if churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia are to plant indigenous churches, the need for intentionally evangelizing and disciplining indigenes, is key in reaching the unreached Muslim groups in the target population of this project.

The Literature Review also pointed out the significance of engaging indigenes with the objective of planting indigenous churches in a given ministry context. Missiologists borrowed the term *indigenous* from agriculture. Indigenous plants can thrive and grow in a certain area. Similarly, indigenous churches are fellowships which are native to their local soil and able to grow and thrive in that given context by reproducing itself in another community (Smalley 81). This was underscored in chapter 4

of Murray's text, who quotes Rufus and Anderson's description of indigenous churches, as "self governing", "self supporting", and "self propagating" (407-412). (qtd. in Murray). The three selves of Rufus and Anderson are best expressed in the context of a church under the leadership of an indigenous pastor/church planter in a given ministry context. An autonomous church naturally exists, grows and reproduces solely through the labour of national converts who passionately and intentionally ensure that the given church supports, governs and propagates itself apart from any dependence or influence from outside foreign sources. Ironically, this picture of an indigenous church planting is far from the reality in what prevailed among pastors in ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All), and pastors from other denominational backgrounds, like the Pentecostal, and Charismatic Churches. Those in the core leadership of these churches were predominantly non- Gambians who depended on support either from the West, or their parent /home churches. For example, my engagement with ECWA churches showed that a number of the key leaders were not only from Nigeria and Sierra Leone, but remuneration for the recruited pastors had to be sent from the Headquarters in Jos, Nigeria.

This is compounded by the fact that, the few indigenous converts in ECWA churches have a different outlook about the church. Their mindset of the church is, what they could get from the church, and not what they could give. My research revealed that, it was not uncommon for some converts/members to look on to the pastor for financial assistance towards cost of transportation at the end of a Sunday service. This scenario not only militates against the establishment of a self-supporting church, but also makes it difficult for that given church to reproduce itself in the unreached communities. The

indigenes who are predominantly Muslims find it difficult to open up to non-indigenous pastors who do not speak their languages nor understood their cultural world.

#### Biblical and Theological Review

Biblical church planting in the New Testament was focused on establishing local churches that were indigenous. In spite of the invaluable significance of planting indigenous churches in a given cultural context, one cannot underestimate the role of non-indigenes in the planting of indigenous churches in the apostolic era. Church planters in the Bible were not all led by indigenous planters but non indigenous people in a new cultural context. The key principle in being indigenous is the nature of the church, not necessarily the messenger. Scripture affirms that, although Paul a Hellenistic Jew, planted indigenous Greek congregations in his church planting strategies, he was from Tarsus not Rome or Ephesus. The extent to which Paul, planted churches among the Greeks in Athens, and the Gentiles in Asia Minor and in Rome, pointed to the fact that non-indigenes could be tools in God's hand in any given geographical location. This is suggestive of the dominant influence of non - indigenes in the planting of churches in my ministry context. Among them were pastors from different parts of West Africa such as: Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

Even though the role of non-indigenes in church planting during the apostolic era is quite evident in Scriptures nevertheless, one cannot divorce indigenous church planting from the cultural world of the New Testament. The New Testament and indigenous churches are generally speaking, one and the same. This is evident from the fact that autonomous indigenous churches were consistently planted in the New Testament in

obedience to the missional mandate of fulfilling the redemptive plan of reaching every ethnic group in culturally relevant ways (Rev.7:9).

**Holistic Approach to Church Planting among Muslim Background Believers.**

Prior to my engagement with the recruited participants for this project, I observed that the church planting method used by the pastors of ECWA Churches, encouraged greater dependence on the parent and head quarter church based in Jos, Nigeria and Kanifng, South, The Gambia respectively. In the light of this, whenever major activities were organized in the headquarter church of ECWA, that demanded the various satellite churches to be present, the responses of these churches were based on the assurance that, money spent towards transportation would be refunded to the pastors of those churches on arrival of the members. Similarly, remuneration of the various employed pastors had to be sent from the parent church, in Jos, Nigeria through the ECWA coordinator, who is based in the head quarter church in The Gambia. This implies that churches planted by the headquarters of ECWA, in Kanifing South , were not self-supporting.

Moreover, as stated earlier in this project, ECWA churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, do not reproduce themselves by planting new indigenous churches in virgin territory on the contrary the composition of the membership was primarily of ECWA members in diaspora and other believers from other churches and not converts from the Islamic faith. This also implied that ECWA churches were neither self-reproducing nor self-propagating.

On the contrary, I noted that the mainline churches like the Methodist, Anglican and Catholic churches engaged in a holistic approach to church planting. This was

evident from the fact that, pastors/priests in these churches communicated the gospel not only by ministering to the Spirit of the people, but by meeting the felt needs of the lost community through the establishment of schools and health centres which served as bridges in communicating the Gospel to the Muslims. I noted that this holistic approach of CPM was also true for pastors from Muslim backgrounds, who were primarily from the Evangelical Church of The Gambia (ECG). The vision bearer of this ministry to Muslim background believers actually established a welfare center in 2004, that provided for accommodation and technical jobs like carpentry and tailoring. This enabled Muslim background believers to hold on to their new-found faith in spite of rejection by families.

These observations for ECWA and other churches were affirmed during my engagement with the research participants of this project. For example, during the semi structured interview conducted among ten of the ECWA pastors, the respondents affirmed that, reaching Muslims was not only a challenge, but the attitude towards financial giving by the few indigenes in ECWA Churches was negative. One of the respondents commented that members come to the church with the mentality of what they can get from the church and not what they can give towards the work of God. Another respondent from ECWA church also indicated that, they needed to introduce the establishment of schools and health centres in The Gambia as it was done in Nigeria before he came to The Gambia as a missionary. He asserted; “Building of health centres, establishing of schools, planting of trees and provision of safe water for the lost community served as bedrock for the planting of churches in Northern Nigeria which is a predominantly Muslim dominated nation”. The leadership of ECWA Churches in The



Gambia, greatly looked forward to implementing similar strategies of communicating the Gospel to the Muslims in the West Coast Region.

At a focus group study conducted among Muslim background believers the need for a holistic approach to church planting was greatly pointed out by the respondents engaged. One of them lamented: “If there was no welfare center like this, to cater for the wellbeing of Muslim converts facing persecutions from families, what would have become of these number of Muslim background believers who are now settled and engaged in different income generating projects?”

He also pointed out that, the welfare center was actually self-supporting, with no regular funds coming from either the West or other churches or institutions in The Gambia, except periodic gifts from friends of the ministry. He also indicated that the center primarily generated income through the hard work of the Muslim background believers who lived in the center, namely, House of Wisdom. Similarly, the recruited respondents from the Methodist church and the Roman Catholic church pointed out that, they were able to plant more indigenous churches among the Muslims in the West Coast Region because of their investment in the establishment of schools, health centres, digging of wells and planting of trees. This is suggestive of the reason why they could plant indigenous churches that are: “self –supporting”, “self-propagating” and “self-reproducing”.

After my engagement with the respective interviewees, the need for a holistic approach to church planting became so apparent that, eighty-three percent of the recruited Pastors (see Figure 4.3 and 4.4) expressed the need for communicating the gospel in the Muslim context of the West Coast through a holistic approach. They came to the

conclusion that, since the churches they pastored were a reflection of the kingdom of God, this justifies the need for a balance between the Word of God and meeting of the felt needs of the lost community and the Muslim background believers in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

The Literature Review of Chapter 2, in this project drives home the need for the holistic approach of church planting in a Muslim context. This is evident from the writings of Murray (418,561), Terry (315), and Warren (91). A common argument that runs through these missiologists and school of thoughts is, the need to do away with the dichotomy between secular and sacred, which is descriptive of the dualistic worldview of church planting. By implication, the worldview of church planters should change from exclusively looking at the church as a physical building to an organism. This affirms the fact that a holistic approach to church planting is critical in postmodern times in the light of meeting both the spiritual and the felt needs of Muslim background believers, as pointed out in my Literature Review.

The need to reach the Muslim community with the Whole gospel for the Whole person clearly relates to the Biblical and Theological framework of this project. This is evident from the fact that holistic mission is not simply a method or strategy but a theological mandate and a life style of obedience (John 20:21). Scripture reveals that Jesus' incarnational principles (Phil. 2:5-8) were associated with both the physical and the spiritual needs of the people (Isa. 61:1-3 cf. Luke 4:18-20; Matt. 25:34-36). Moreover, Jesus' mission Statement (Luke 4:18-20) coupled with his teachings (Matt.4:17; Mark1:15; Luke 4:43; Matt.6:10) and miracles (Matt.14:13-21; Mk6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17) suggests to readers in post-modern times, of the need for a holistic

approach to church planting in the twenty-first Century. This principle of church planting, was also true of His Apostles (Acts. 11:20-30; 1Cor.1:19-20; 1Thess.4:11-12; 2Thess.3:7-8) in the apostolic era. The holistic approaches to church planting exemplified by both Jesus and his apostles suggest that church planting method of the first century, incorporated the whole person- life on this earth and life after death (Matt.6:10). This implied an integration of both word and deed.

In light of the above, one can hardly divorce evangelism from the meeting of the felt needs of the people in the community. Church planting specifically in a Muslim context cannot be done in a vacuum without taking cognisance of the felt needs of the people. It definitely calls for the need to enter the world and life of the Muslims which in my view is authentic mission, demonstrated by Jesus and his disciples in the first century. Similarly, the church in postmodern times, as the hands and feet of Jesus, is to strike the balance between word and deed by reaching out to broken lives and homes in an ever-changing world. This principle of meeting both felt needs and spiritual needs of converts, is critical for Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in a Muslim majority context in perilous times as this. In my ministry context, Muslim converts are faced with so many challenges that they could be easily tempted to quit their new-found faith. A few of them have actually gone back to their former way of life, due to challenges of meeting their felt needs due to persecutions. If church planters only focus on the spiritual lives of converts and give a blind eye to addressing the felt needs of the Muslim converts, there would be a greater tendency for those MBBs to go back to their former Islamic practices due to isolation and persecution.

## **Relationship Building with Muslims, a Bridge to the Planting of Indigenous Churches.**

Having lived in a Muslim majority context for over two decades, I noted that it was common for pastors in the West Coast Division of The Gambia, to relate well among themselves through the formation of Christian fellowships such as: The Association of Sierra Leonean Ministers (ASLEM), Association of Nigerian Ministers (AONM), and the Association of Ghanaian Ministers (AOGM). While such associations served as a platform for building friendship and solidarity among pastors and their respective congregations who were primarily non-Gambians, not much intentional efforts were made in relating with Imams and the indigenes who were predominantly Muslims. This description was a true for most of the pastors from Pentecostal, Charismatic backgrounds and a few from evangelical backgrounds, like ECWA church. On the contrary, it was common to find the priests or parish or circuit heads from the mainline churches like: the Methodist, Anglican and Catholic denominations relating with indigenous Muslims during Islamic festivals like: Tobaski and Ramadan which entail an exchanged of raw meat and dishes respectively.

Similarly, these priests and their respective church members exchanged a locally prepared dish specifically, on Easter Monday called, '*Namburu*.' Moreover, I discovered that most pastors from these mainline churches demonstrated practical love by meeting some of the felt needs of the indigenes through relevant humanitarian gestures like awarding scholarships to needy students irrespective of religious beliefs, and building health centres. This exchange of dishes (table fellowships) between the community of faith from the Mainline churches and their neighbourhoods who were

predominantly Muslims, and some humanitarian gestures actually fostered friendship between the Christians and Muslims which subsequently served as a bridge in planting indigenous churches in the predominantly Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. I discovered most members of mainline churches discussed in this project were indigenes.

During the course of my research, I intentionally engaged with the ten participants from ECWA and other churches as revealed in Figure 4.1. I observed a conflict of opinions among the twenty-nine recruited participants as only seventy nine (twenty-three participants, out of twenty-nine) subscribed to the view of relationship building as a bridge for church planting in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This implies twenty-one percent (six participants, out of twenty-nine) of the respondents argued that, Muslims in their community were difficult to reach, no matter the extent of relationship established with them (See Figure 4.4). This was suggestive of the preconceived ideas these interviewees had developed about Muslims.

I was however overwhelmed by a statement by most of the pastors at a focus group study, especially those six pastors from a Muslim background and the three Priests from the mainline churches indicated in Figure 4.1. They maintained that, relationship building precedes trust from Muslims. In their view, it takes relationship building through friendship formation and demonstration of practical love, before Muslims can undo the preconceived ideas they had formed about Christianity and the Bible. One of the respondents from a Muslim background pointed out, “The genuine love I experienced among Christians while I lived among them, actually attracted me to the Christian faith.

Muslims have a different concept about love. I have never experienced such show of love between the imam and those from the Muslim community of faith”.

This statement opened my eyes to the fact that, until cordial relationship is developed between Christians and Muslims, there is no way the latter would open up their lives to the Christian faith. Subsequently, responses from the interviewees to my third research question (RQ3), for this study showed a consensus regarding the need for relationship building as one of the best practices of church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region (See Table. 4.4 and Figure 4.4).

Subsequently, in spite of the diversity of views on relationship building among the research participants, I noticed a consensus regarding among the interviewees, that relationship building leading to conversion of a Muslim cannot be sudden. In their view, the art of relationship building was time consuming and demanded absolute patience on the part of the person communicating the gospel to the unreached and unchurched people group. This suggests in my view, the need for the church planter to play his part in restoring broken lives and relationships, then leaving the result of his work, to the Holy Spirit who ultimately brings the unreached people groups unto himself in the fulness of time.

After the conducting the semi structured interviews and focus group studies among the respondents of this study, I observed an attitudinal change among the few pastors who had developed the preconceive notion that, “no matter the extent of love shown and relationship established with the Muslim, the latter could hardly be won over to embrace the Christian faith.” This underscored the differences in data collected on relationship building between Table 4.1 and Table 4.4, Figure 4.4 indicates an increase in

responses to relationship building from seventy-nine percent to one hundred percent. In the light of this analysed data, I noted a change of perspective in the mindset of six pastors who had developed preconceive ideas about relationship building with Muslims.

The preconceive thought that a fervent Muslim would want only the earthly gift from the church planter and not the message of eternal life, eroded from the thoughts of some of the respondents who had developed a negative attitude toward the demonstration of love in the context of relationship building. This subsequently gave birth to a paradigm shift in their approaches to the planting of indigenous churches among Muslims. I was therefore greatly encouraged and challenged to discover that, relationship building indeed served as the bridge to the planting of indigenous churches, as evident in the planting of churches by the pastors of Muslim background believers.

The Literature Review of this study affirmed the need for relationship building as a bridge to the planting of indigenous churches among the Muslims. This is evident from the writings of Livingstone (190), Alavi (11), Marsh (302-306), Redford (8-23), Corner(228) and, Massih (50-51). The theme of relationship building came out strongly in all of these texts and articles. Each of these schools of thought and missiologists pointed out the fact that, relationship building with the unreached and unchurched people group in a lost community is the bedrock for communicating the Gospel in any ministry context.

This justifies Livingstone's argument saying, "One cannot make disciples until friends are made (13)". By implication, the expression of God's love to the Muslim, by transforming the lost community through the meeting of felt needs would serve as a bridge in the establishment of intimate relationships between the church planter and the

unreached people group in that given community. This is more critical for the Muslim whose world view of God's love differs from that of Christians. The extent to which the church planter demonstrates love in the context of relationship building, serves as an eye opener to the Muslim to see God at work in the life of the church planter in a Muslim majority context. The demonstration of love in the context of relationship building is therefore the key to incarnational mission.

This method of church planting through relationship building is expressed in the biblical and theological framework of this project. This is evident from Jesus' miracles among the unreached people groups in Palestine and his relationship with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-30). Apostle Paul also demonstrated this biblical truth as he communicated the gospel to the Thessalonians saying, "We were gentle among you just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children, so affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1Thess. 2:7-8).

This statement of Paul paints a vivid picture of his earnest passion to establish a deeper relationship beyond mere words, with the saints in Thessalonica. Similarly, he demonstrated the value of relationship building as a method of church planting through the context of team work in his missionary journeys with Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Silas and Mark. The network of relationship built with them served as a key channel in reaching the disconnected and unchurched people groups in Asia and the Roman Empire. Peter's vision (Acts.9:9-23 cf.24-33) before his encounter with Cornelius also demonstrates to the contemporary how relationships could break all forms of prejudice to reach the disconnected.



The need to build relationship with the unreached and unchurched that are disconnected from God is key in the planting of healthy indigenous missional churches. The realization of such a redemptive plan of God in a pluralistic and post - modern world, is however both financially costly and time consuming. Church planters in the contemporary world should be prepared not only to communicate the unchanging message of salvation to broken lives in a changing world, but they should be sensitive to address the felt needs of the unreached people group in a given community in the context of relationship building, as exemplified by Jesus and his Apostles in the first century. Such an approach to church planting is descriptive of an incarnational church planting model.

Moreover, relationship building with the Muslim cannot be done overnight; it is time consuming. This is quite apparent in a cross -cultural context where the church planter needs to see the world through the eyes of the people living in that given community. Therefore, since Muslims are generally believed to be difficult to reach on account of their prejudices and misconceptions about Christianity and its beliefs, the art of communicating the gospel suggests the need for an intentional healthy relationship-building approach that would develop into trust; and which in the fulness of time, could serve as a bed rock to communicating the gospel to the Muslim.

This actually varies from context to context, and people to people. It is noteworthy that, Jesus spent thirty years before he started reaching out with the help of the Holy Spirit to the unreached people groups in his community and beyond. This therefore justifies the need for the church planter to absolutely depend upon the Holy Spirit in communicating the gospel message. Paul affirms this in his letter to the

Corinthians saying, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So, neither he who plants, nor he who waters it, is anything, but God makes it grow” (1Cor.3:6-7). Church planters in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of the Gambia, need absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit to win the hearts of the unreached Muslim group to the saving knowledge of Christ.

### **Persecutions, as Barrier to Church Planting among Muslims**

One of the issues that spurred me prior to my engagement with participants recruited in this study was my observation that a significant percentage of my targeted population in the West Coast Region of the Gambia were strong and fervent adherents of Islamic beliefs and practices. Evidence of this fervency coupled with fear is that, there was always an overwhelming response from the people in the community for Friday prayers in the mosque and observance of Islamic religious festivals like: Ramadan, and Tobaski. During the Friday prayers for example, I noticed, most of the shops would be closed for prayers in the mosque. The few shop keepers who could not go to the mosque would pray in their shops, but not attend to customers who may want to buy. A few determined customers would actually stand by, waiting for the shop keeper to finish his prayers. Moreover, I observed that, religious festivals like Ramadan and Tobaski go with thirty days of fasting and the killing of lambs, per household respectively. Subsequently, school children in high schools, for example, were forced to fast, failing which, they may not get food at home when they return from school. Many family heads and school children actually adhered to such Islamic practices out of compulsion and fear of being rejected by their family members or Muslim community.

This spirit of fear of rejection and intimidation from families and the Muslim community subsequently informed the negative attitude and behaviour of the Muslims toward the Bible and its practices. This fear of persecution was compounded by the fact that the targeted population for this project, indicated in Figure 4.2, was a closely knit family. This was expressed not only in their collective responses to prayers, but at table fellowship which required them to share meals together from a single dish. The above description explains in my view, the seemingly negative responses to the planting of indigenous churches in my ministry context. For example, having worshipped with my family at ECWA church for about six years, only two Muslim converts were found among the ten churches established by ECWA. The irony is that, even the two converts eventually left the church primarily due to persecution.

During my engagement with the recruited participants for this study, my initial observations on the extent to which the fear of persecutions from families informed the attitude and behaviour of Muslims to the gospel, was affirmed by all the respondents (see.figure 4:4) showing positive responses from the twenty-nine participants on persecutions from families as key barriers to CPM in the WCR. Subsequently, during the conduct of interviews and focus group studies, each of the respondents actually narrated various forms of persecutions faced by the Muslim converts in their congregations such as: expulsion from the family home, exclusion from key job opportunities, marginalization in the market by the Muslim community and actually terrorizing the lives of Muslim converts. These forms of persecutions were expressed not only verbally, but through their facial expressions and gestures. This underscored the extent to which the fear of persecution from families constituted a key barrier to the planting of indigenous

churches in the majority Muslim context of the West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia.

One of the pastors who was a Muslim background believer actually narrated a horrible incident in which a female Muslim convert was driven from home and later tortured publicly in the market place. I was grieved to learn that, the lady in question eventually died in the home of a friend who opened her house to the victim. At a focus group study conducted among Muslim background believers, I also noted with great disappointment, when one of the respondents pointed out the extent to which persecution from families caused a Muslim background believer went back to Islam. I was particularly surprised to learn that a Korean missionary body based in the West Coast Region of the Gambia, had actually sponsored the Muslim convert to pursue further theological studies in Ghana for a period of three years, only to go back to his former way of life on his return to The Gambia. I was quite puzzled as to the reason(s) for the denial of the Christian faith by the Muslim background believer who had been trained by the missionary. One possible explanation to this was persecution from his family and Muslim community.

Similarly, another respondent lamented “If there were no rehabilitation center like the House of Wisdom built 10 years ago, what could have become of about thirty family members who were rejected by their families because of their new faith in Christ?”. The physical gestures and facial expressions of this respondent vividly showed his concern for the fate of Muslim background believers in defence of their new-found faith. This was affirmed by the overwhelming comment by the recruited respondents that, persecutions from families and the community constituted a key barrier.

At the end of the interviews and focus group studies, it was observed that the findings related to persecutions from families and the community, served as a wake -up call to all the respondents, to be intentional and more strategic in the planting of indigenous churches among the Muslims. This is evident from the data analysed on the responses from the research participants on overcoming barriers of church planting as shown in Figure 4.3. What attracted my attention most was that, all the interviewees affirmed the need for friendship and relationship building as bridges to overcoming barriers to church planting among the Muslims, while ninety- six percent of the respondents pointed out the need to live among the indigenes and ninety- three emphasized the place of prayer in response to the question on overcoming barriers to church planting in the Muslim context of the WCR.

My Literature Review resonates with my findings on how persecutions from families and community constituted a key hindrance to the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This is evident from the writings of Ron Peck (12), Wilson (106). These schools of thought pointed out various dimensions of persecutions characteristic of church planting in a Muslim context. Wilson for example argued that “a far stronger deterrent to becoming a Christian is the fact that doing so will break the bonds of family life and bring aspersion and persecution not only upon themselves, but also on the members of their own household, whom they love (106). Wilson’s point of view is critical, as Islam is viewed not only as a religion but a cultural way of life, integrated into a close-knit family system, which differed from Christianity that is generally associated with western colonialism and individualism.

The persecution encountered by Christians in early church history echoed the biblical and theological framework underlining the findings that related to persecutions of Muslim converts in defence of their faith in Christ. This is evident from the fact that, much of the Christian faith and mission in the first two hundred years of church history were practised in the context of repressive regimes and leaderships like: Nero-(AD 54-68); Domitian (AD 81-96), Trajan(AD 98-117) Diocletian (303-311), Felix, Herod Agrippa, and the Sanhedrin Council- whose periods of leadership were characterized by conflicting religious beliefs and cultural worldviews.

In spite of these forms of persecutions, believers in early Church history and apostolic era were able to conquer a greater part of the Roman world through perseverance and untold sacrifices, though a number of them among the Jewish and Roman church believers died as martyrs. This is evident from the lives of Peter (Acts 4:18-20, 5:29; Stephen (Acts 7:51-59); Saul (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2, 14, 21 and Paul (Acts 12:1-25; 24:14-15). The positive attitude of these faithful followers of Christ(Rom.8:31-39) is suggestive of the fact that, Muslim background believers and church planters in the twenty- first century, should be prepared to pay the ultimate price, if indigenous and culturally relevant churches are to be planted in a Muslim context.

Life is all about attitude, and that our attitude determines our altitude. This is true for persecution that Muslim converts are faced with for their faith in Christ, or persecutions Christians experience in a Muslim community in defence of their faith. This therefore calls for a positive attitude, knowing that we are just partners with God in fulfilling his redemptive plan for humanity. The extent to which we can grow in our faith is proportional to our attitude in the face of challenges/persecutions. Tertullian argues

that the “blood of the martyrs, is the seed of the church,” Similarly, the Muslim fanatics could take away their lives or the life of others in defence of their faith in Allah. Church planters in the twenty-first century need to be conscious of the fact that there is nothing new under the sun. The attitude of believers like Stephen in the first century, to persecution served as a platform for the expansion of the church. On the same note, it is apparent that, in spite of persecution in the Middle East such as- Afghanistan, Indonesia etc, Muslims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are coming to faith in Christ at an unprecedented rate. Church planters/pastors in postmodern times should view persecutions encountered by Muslims not as stumbling blocks, but as stepping stones in communicating the gospel. The expression- “no price, no gain,” is a helpful one in shaping our attitude to persecution. This is affirmed by encouragement from the pioneer church planter Paul in Romans 8:35; Philppian 3:14.

Muslim background believers should not compromise their faith in the face of adversity but should stand tall in their faith with the confidence of their new identity in Christ. Similarly, church planters /pastors should not be intimidated to reach Muslims for fear of rejection or how a Muslim would respond to the gospel. On the contrary, the church planter should have a positive attitude and be courageous to partner with God in reaching Muslims by sharing the unchanging Word of God, and leaving the result of conversion to him.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

Based on the seven findings discovered in conducting semi -structured interviews and focus group studies among my twenty-nine research participants, below are the ministry implications of some of these findings, with emphasis on how they will

be used, their impacts and how they will inform the practice of ministry in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

First, the findings showed overwhelming responses from the respondents on the need for contextualization of the gospel, in the Muslim majority community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia (See Figure 4.3 and 4). This implies that, the planting of indigenous churches among the muslims can best be done in the context of contextualization of the gospel. This is critical as the targeted population of this study constituted not only Muslim adherents, but people from diverse cultural backgrounds that could influence their decision making for Christ. Apparently, if pastors and church planters in the WCR of The Gambia are to establish healthy indigenous churches in post-modern times, especially among the unreached and disconnected Muslim groups, the art of contextualizing the gospel message should inform the practice of ministry. Contextualization of the unchanging message in a changing world therefore becomes a non-negotiable factor.

Church planters should take cognisance of the fact that, just because a particular church planting practice seemed to work well in a given geographical location or ministry context, it does not connote that particular method will do well in another locality. The need to identify and carry out a church planting method that is culturally relevant, is therefore critical, if healthy indigenous churches are to be planted among the disconnected and unchurched people groups in our communities.

This principle of contextualization is even more critical if the church planter is to win over the hearts of Muslims who are greatly influenced by an Islamic worldview which looks at Christianity/church planting as alien an alien. Subsequently, pastors and



church planters should intentionally and strategically carry out culturally relevant ways of church planting methods that would give birth to the planting of healthy indigenous churches, and not churches with borrowed cultures from other geographical locations.

Second, the findings from my study revealed that, the dominant role of non-indigenous pastors in the planting of churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, was a key challenge in the planting of indigenous churches in that ministry context. This was evident from the fact that the indigenes viewed the Christian Message from pastors in places like: Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana as alien to their culture. This was compounded by the inability of these pastors to understand the cultural world of the Muslims and communicate the Christian message in any of the local languages. My engagement with the recruited participants vividly revealed that, an understanding of any of the local languages do serve as a bridge in reaching the unreached people groups. By implication, pastors of ECWA and other churches have to intentionally evangelize indigenes who could be effectively discipled and trained to reach their own people, in culturally relevant ways that would lead to the establishment of indigenous churches. The few churches planted by the non-indigenous pastors, would be unable to plant indigenous churches due to a method of CPM that is alien to the targeted population of this study.

Third, the study findings indicated that church planting in my targeted population, attracted persecutions from families and the Islamic community as affirmed in Figure 4:3 of this project. Church planters have to intentionally identify not only a specific strategic approach in communicating the Gospel to the Muslim, but should do so, with great wisdom, passion, prayers and patience in order to win the heart of the Muslim

adherent for Christ, and ensure the commitment and steadfastness of the MBBs in their new-found faith. This approach to church planting in a Muslim context should therefore inform the practice of ministry not only in the targeted population for this study, but other Muslim majority communities where pastors are faced with similar challenges in reaching the unreached people groups in their communities.

Moreover, persecutions from families and the Muslim community implies not only the need for prayers, passion and patience in the mission drive of reaching the Muslim, but it calls for practical steps on the part of the church planter such as: intentional relationship building with the indigenes, coupled with the church planters acquisition of cultural knowledge on both the world of Islam and the way of life of the people in that given community as indicated in Table 4.3 of this study.

Fourthly, another ministry implication of the findings to this study is that, the planting of indigenous churches in a Muslim context is a product of incarnational mission. This ministry implication is key for a missional church planting in contemporary times. This is evident from the fact that, the need for the church planter to live among the indigenes, serves as a strategic approach of communicating the Gospel to the unreached people groups and is indeed an integral part of authentic mission. This strategy should therefore inform the practice of ministry, if indigenous churches are to be planted among Muslims in the WCR of The Gambia. This was underscored by Jesus' mission to a needy and broken world as he lived among the Jewish people (Phil.2:5-8). Incarnational mission creates room for the church planter to enter the cultural world of Muslims, by studying and understanding their languages (dialects), culture, beliefs and practices. This

subsequently results in the building of trust with the indigenes, which serves as a bridge for winning over the heart of the Muslim to the Christian faith.

Finally, the need for a holistic approach in the planting of indigenous churches has great implications for church planters in postmodern times. This is evident from the fact that, human beings are tripartite in nature, meaning, they have a spirit, a soul and live in the body. This is therefore suggestive of the reason Jesus and his apostles, engaged in life transforming activities, to bring hope to broken lives and homes. Similarly, church planters in the contemporary period, should implement a holistic approach to church planting which would serve as a bridge in communicating the Gospel message to a needy world, most especially in a Muslim context, as indicated in this project. These various ministry implications are critical for church planting, and should inform the practise of ministry, if pastors and church planters of WCR are to plant healthy indigenous churches in a Muslim majority context.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited in five main areas, which may affect the generalisation of the findings to this study. First, among the twenty-nine participants engaged for this study, only two of them were women and those selected women were also lay people (see.figure 4:1). The opinion of this small percentage of women among my respondents did not adequately reflect the views of all women in the West Coast Region of the Gambia, with regard to indigenous church planting among Muslims. This wide gap in gender differences among my research participants may have created room for bias in data collected for this study. It is however noteworthy that the choice of a small percentage of women as shown in this study, was an indication of a male-dominated

community especially in the ECWA church and the Pentecostal churches. This is however not true of the Methodist and Anglican Churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, where women are ordained and play critical roles in church planting among the unreached people groups in The Gambia.

Second, the majority of the research participants were recruited from the Administrative Headquarter of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, namely Brikama, which constituted forty- one percent of my targeted population for this project (see Figure 4.2). This decision was due to the fact that, the geographical region of Brikama, is a cosmopolitan society with different ethnic groups residing. It was also more accessible to the researcher for administering his questionnaires, compared to the rural areas of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

In spite of these advantages associated with Brikama, the overwhelming choice of participants in that geographical location, was not adequate representation of the views of all the ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia nor of all the pastors from the other regions in The Gambia namely: St. Mary's Kombo, Upper River Division, Lower River Division and Central River Division. The absence of the views of other ethnic groups /pastors in both the West Coast Region of The Gambia, and the remaining Divisional Headquarters of The Gambia as indicated in this study, were key limitations to this project. I only wished I had a fairly broad representation of participants from the total population in the West Coast Region of the Gambia. That certainly, could have minimized elements of bias in this project, thereby making my findings more objective, enriched and strengthened for the use of future researchers, church planters and theological institutions.

Third, the medium of communication for conducting both semi-structured interviews and focus group studies was exclusively in English, and not in any of the local languages spoken by the respondents. This was primarily due to the fact that, I could not speak any of the indigenous languages. Subsequently, I had to intentionally recruit participants who could respond to his items in Appendixes- A, B and C, without the aid of an interpreter. Failure on my part to engage my interviewees through any of their local languages may have created room for bias in responses given and subsequently in the validity of the data collected and analysed by the researcher.

This is evident from the fact that, some of my interviewees could have found it easier to express themselves on the administered questionnaires, if the medium for conducting the semi structured interviews and focus group studies, were their respective local languages. This in my view, could have created room for the participants engaged for this qualitative project, to be biased in their responses because, they may have viewed me as an ‘outsider’ (foreigner) presenting a colonial and Western form of religion that was alien to their culture.

Fourth, the instrumentation used for this project, was inadequate. It was exclusively semi-structured interviews and focus group studies with emphasis on a qualitative approach, and not the administration of questionnaires which could have projected a quantitative dimension of these study findings. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods would definitely have strengthened the validity of this project.

Finally, the pattern of data collection and analysis in Chapter 3 of this project, was also another limitation to this project. Though I discovered some helpful insights on data analysis from the readings of scholars like- Sensing, Moschella, Merriam, and Creswell,

which greatly helped him to carry out an in-depth analysis on data collected from my respondents, nevertheless, the analysed data for this project may not be devoid of shortcomings. This is evident from the fact that, having collected the data from the research participants through personal observation and the help of an audio recorder, the analysis and coding of the data, was literally done by me, who took an objective look at the repetition of different patterns and themes that emerged in the data collected.

It is possible that the approach of data analysis shown, may have created room for some elements of subjectivity and bias on my part as an investigator, due to my background knowledge and experiences on church planting in a Muslim context. I only wished I had software in my laptop, which could electronically facilitate the analysis of my raw data, thereby eliminating any form of subjectivity and bias in my analysed data. The use of such an electronic device could have strengthened the reliability and validity of my study findings.

In the light of these limitations pointed out in this study, the generalisations of these findings is not quite feasible, as the project was specifically designed for pastors and churches located in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The targeted population of this study, comprised of different ethnic groups like the- Mandinka, Jola, Karonicas and Manjangos with distinctive cultures, beliefs and practices different from the ethnic groups in the other regions of The Gambia, revealed in Chapter 1 of this study.

Moreover, the Mandinka and Jola who constituted the major ethnic groups in the WCR, are more resistant to the Christian faith than other ethnic groups (Wolof, Akus, Serers, Fula) in the regions outside this study namely: Kombo St. Mary, Central River Division, Lower River Division and Upper River Division. This implies that, certain

church planting practices in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, may not be culturally relevant to the planting of indigenous churches outside the scope of this project. It is however noteworthy that, some of the findings of this study, were key church planting principles that could be generalized in the other Regions of The Gambia, not covered by this project.

### **Unexpected Observations**

During the course of engagement with my research participants, I experienced three key surprises that actually opened my eyes to new and deeper insights in the planting of indigenous churches, in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. These unanticipated findings (observations) positively sharpened my understanding in effectively communicating the gospel among the unreached people group in my ministry context. They are as follows:

#### **Communicating the Gospel in the local languages, as a Bridge to Church Planting among Muslims**

First, during the conduct of a focus group study among MBBs, I was greatly shocked to learn from one of the participants who was a Fula woman, on the extent to which Islam could blind the eyes of Muslim adherents. In response to one of my items, she stated: “on my first visit in a Muslim Background Believing church, I vividly heard the congregation praying to God in my mother tongue, Fula. I never thought God could hear the prayers of people in any other language besides Arabic.” I noticed that, the facial expressions and bodily gestures which accompanied this statement indicated a great sigh of relief for her. The experienced gained by the MBB during first visit to an MBB church, served as a turning point in her life in embracing the Christian faith.

When I probed further to find out the reason(s) why Muslims hold on to such a narrow view about praying to God, I was further shocked to learn from her that, the Qur'an, which is believed by Muslims as the final revelation from God, was dictated verbatim by the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) to the Prophet Mohammad. In the world of Islam, this affirms the belief of Muslims, in communicating to Allah (God), exclusively in Arabic. Subsequently the statement made and explanations given by the respondent, were great surprises to me because, they differed from my theology of God as one who dwells in eternity past and one who is Omniscient, Omnipresent and omnipotent. By implication God is not limited to any specific language as claimed by Muslim fanatics. With Christ's death on Cross, he opened the middle wall of partition for believers to boldly approach the throne of grace for all time. Moreover, the Bible as the Holy Scriptures is believed to be written by forty authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with no messages received verbatim from Angels as Muslims believe with the Qur'an. The statements made by the Fulawoman (MBB), opened my eyes to realize how the art of communicating with God in our local languages, could serve as a bridge to reaching the Muslims for Christ.

### **Contextualization as a Bridge to Communicating the Gospel in a Muslim context**

Second, before I conducting a focus group study among the Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) for this study, I attended Sunday morning worship service alongside six of my respondents who were Muslim Background Believers. On arriving at the entrance of the place of worship (namely House of Wisdom), I was greatly shocked to find the shoes of all the members of the congregation gathered at the entrance of the door to the church. Without being told, I did likewise. That was the first church I had ever



attended in the Gambia with the shoes of the congregation assembled outside the church premises. My greatest surprise was, finding everybody seated on the mat including the two pastors of the congregation. Even suckling mothers sat on the mat with their children. Moreover, even though the worshippers were happily worshipping God in their local languages, no musical instruments were used. This was a big surprise to me because, having lived in The Gambia for over twenty years that was the first time, I entered a church and observed that form of worship. As a guest, I was however given a chair to use. I observed the same pattern of worship, during my second visit to follow up some observations I had made before. Like my first visit, I was offered a chair. Out of submission, I denied the offer of seating on the chair, but sat on the mat like the rest of the congregation. What compounded my surprise was when one of the respondents explained the reasons for their pattern of worship. He indicated, that this pattern of worship has served as a way of bridging the gap between the initial place of worship of Muslim converts (the mosque) to a different place of worship (the church). Second, in explaining to me the reason for the absence of drumming in the church, one of the participants pointed out “the uses of drums are associated with the worship of idols in our Islamic worldview.”

### **Steadfastness in the Christian faith, as a Muslim background Believer**

Third, I was greatly shocked to learn of an MBB who returned to his former Islamic beliefs and practices after being sponsored throughout his secondary school education and gaining further theological knowledge and training for three years in Ghana. I was particularly taken aback to learn from one of the respondents that the Muslim convert who rejected the Christian faith, actually taught Christian Religious

Studies (CRS) for a period of one year in a secondary school on his return from studies in Ghana. This attitude of the MBB opened my eyes to the fact that church planting in a Muslim context does not only demand financial resources, but great wisdom and insight from God as to what extent pastors/mission agencies could invest in Muslim converts. This was evident from the fact that some of the few Muslim converts initially embraced the Christian faith to satisfy their hidden temporal earthly desires, but not a genuine quest for eternal life in Christ.

### **Recommendations**

Based upon the findings of this qualitative study, the following are my recommendations that could be used for changes in the practice of ministry by pastors, church planters, theological institutions, mission agencies and prospective researchers on this topic or related ones to this study. I am confident that if the recommendations below are implemented, they would greatly influence positive changes, resulting in the planting of more indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

- i. The study pointed out that Muslim misconceptions and prejudices about Christianity vis- a -vis Christians preconceived perceptions about Islam and Muslims constituted a key challenge in the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. In the light of this, I recommend that the leadership of theological institutions based in The Gambia should intentionally include in their curriculum studies related to Islam, as an integral part of the theological training for pastors, church planters and laities. If this recommendation is implemented, I am confident that it will certainly bring about a paradigm shift in both the theology and

attitude of the beneficiaries of such training in their church planting strategies for reaching Muslims. This is evident from the fact that the knowledge and training acquired at the seminary in reaching the Muslims, would serve as a bridge to communicating the gospel to the lost without prejudice. Subsequently, many unreached and unchurched Muslims in my ministry context would be positively engaged with the gospel, with passion and an open mind, while leaving the result of conversion to the working of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to this, seminars and workshops should be periodically conducted in strategic places, specifically targeting both indigenous and non-indigenous pastors, church planters and Christians alike. The seminars/workshops should be based on key insights for the planting of healthy indigenous churches in a Muslim context. It is critical that, such seminars should also incorporate teachings on key controversial issues characteristic of church planting among the Muslims, such as: what the Quran says about the worship of God, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I am of the opinion that, if pastors, and church planters are knowledgeable on these seemingly controversial biblical facts, and other related Christian beliefs and practices as viewed by the Muslims, this would certainly help pastors, church planters and Christians in general, in their responses to judgmental attitudes and misconceptions from Muslims.

The irony is that, most of Muslims are actually ignorant on the teachings of the Islamic faith which they profess to practise. Their shallow knowledge of the Qur'an serves as the breeding ground for their distorted views on the Bible and subsequent prejudices on the beliefs and practices of Christianity. Similarly, most pastors and church

planters are actually ignorant about Islam and its teachings as stipulated in the Qur'an. This is suggestive of the need in my view, for pastors, and church planters to acquire deeper insight on the fundamental beliefs and practices of Islam, alongside the teachings of the Bible and the practices of Christianity; if they are to plant healthy and life transforming indigenous churches among the Muslims in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

ii. Pastors, church planters and laities need a paradigm shift in their worldview that Muslims are difficult to reach for Christ. In my opinion, pastors and church planters need to understand that Muslims are part of God's redemptive plan of salvation. This underscores the need for an attitudinal change in looking at the Muslim with the eyes of God, who does not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (John 3:16;1Tim.2:4). The church is the vehicle to fulfil this missional mandate not only to the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, but to the entire nation of the Gambia and the broken world in general. This implies that pastors/missionaries/church planters and laities need to rise up to the challenges of restoring broken relationships to God in their communities. This can best be done on the platform of an open mind and Spassions to reach the Muslim without preconceive ideas, thereby depending upon the Holy Spirit to win the hearts of the Muslim adherents.

iii. The findings for this study showed that, family persecutions coupled with community isolation of Muslim background believers constituted a key hindrance to the planting of indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia (See Table 4.2). I would recommend that ECWA and other churches establish rehabilitation centres.

Such facilities would help MBBs find solace, and gain confidence both in the defence and practice of their new-found faith in Christ. It will also, create a platform for MBBs to acquire basic skills and knowledge that would empower them to gain self-sufficiency in the face of experiencing rejection and isolation from their loved ones at home, and the Muslim community in general.

Moreover, churches and Mission agencies should intentionally generate funds towards the education of children and youths who may be rejected by their families for embracing the Christian faith. If all of these suggestions are carried out, Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) would be encouraged to stand firm in their Christian faith, and not turn away from it, due to persecutions from their family members and the Muslim community.

iv. Pastors of ECWA and other churches should plant house churches particularly in the rural areas where the indigenes would be engaged through Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). This strategy in my opinion would not only be cost effective, but will serve as a strategic approach in communicating the gospel to the Muslim majority community in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The Western architectural design of churches in my ministry context is generally associated by the indigenes with a Western form of Religion which repels the Muslim from embracing the Christian faith. If this recommendation is implemented, this would facilitate Muslim converts to worship in the house churches with ease, without fear of intimidation or persecution from the Muslim community.

v. The study revealed that growth in the size of the congregations of pastors of ECWA churches and pastors of some of the other churches engaged with, in this study,

was realized through “transfer growth” and not “church planting” in its biblical sense. This, in my view, is descriptive of an attractive model of church planting, but not a missional and incarnational church planting strategy. This practice of church planting should therefore be changed. Alternatively, pastors in the West Coast Region of the Gambia should be intentional and strategic in reaching out to Muslims and not believers from other churches who are already in the kingdom of God.

I recommend that, pastors in the West Coast Region of The Gambia could still maintain their denominational distinctiveness, but develop the spirit of team work and collaborative style. This will serve as a platform where by, limited human, material and financial resources could be jointly shared, under the umbrella of Gambia Christian Council, with the specific and strategic goal of planting indigenous churches. Subsequently, souls won in that specific community could be encouraged to worship in a particular Bible believing church in the given locality that is passionate about reaching Muslims. This therefore suggests the need for pastors/priests to lay aside unhealthy competition for the few percentage of Christians already in the faith, but rather intentionally and passionately target the unchurched and unreached people groups among the Muslims in my ministry context.

In addition to this, I recommend a collaborative style of planting indigenous churches, by pastors of churches, working in partnership with interdenominational agencies/churches such as: House of Wisdom (All Home for Christ), and National Evangelism Christian Outreach (NECO). The latter is a ministry primarily focused on generating funds for the purpose of sponsoring evangelists and church planters that would live among the indigenes in a given unreached community, for the primary objective of

fulfilling the missional mandate to the Church. By implications, souls won into the kingdom of God under the umbrella of NECO/House of Wisdom, would be handed over to the church leadership of the local congregation that was partnered with for outreach purposes.

vi. Due to the movement of believers from one church to another, coupled with the persecutions of Muslim background believers discovered in this study, I recommend that three forms of discipleship pattern be designed and implemented, specifically tailored to meet the needs of Muslim background believers, church goers/attendees, and converts from the background of traditional worshippers. I believe that, if this recommendation is carried out, it will result to in reproduction of other disciples who would subsequently plant indigenous churches that would multiply themselves in other unreached communities in WCR.

vii. The study pointed out, the need for relationship building as a bridge in the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. This was compounded by the discovery that, most of those in the key leadership positions in ECWA churches and other Pentecostal and Charismatic churches were non-indigenes who could not speak any of the local languages, nor understood the key cultural beliefs and practices which are critical in fostering relationship building, and subsequent planting of indigenous churches in a predominantly Muslim community.

I recommend that, pastors/missionaries/church planters of ECWA Churches and those from other churches, who are non- Gambians, should intentionally spend quality time and financial resources in both learning and speaking at least one of the local languages in the community they are engaged with. This will subsequently facilitate

communicating the gospel among the indigenes who are not only predominantly Muslims, but illiterate. If this recommendation is done, it will enable these pastors not only to share the gospel in the local languages of the indigenes, but it would also facilitate the conduct of musical worship, reading of the Scriptures, and prayers done in one of the local languages as various expressions of contextualization. These contextualized forms of church planting strategies would ultimately give birth to the planting of indigenous churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Subsequently, some of the Muslims would establish trust in the gospel message; which could contribute to eliminating their distorted view of looking at Christianity as a Western form of Religion; thereby facilitate winning the hearts of the Muslims for Christ in the course of time.

viii. Short term theological training in the Gambia. I would also recommend that, pastors and heads of missions do organize locally based trainings in their respective churches that are focused on key church planting and discipleship training principles. Key indigenous people of influence in these local churches should be prayerfully identified to benefit from such trainings. Moreover, indigenes who are Muslim background believers should be sponsored to benefit from such short- term Mission trainings offered by Bible Institutions in the The Gambia such as: Servants of the Word Ministry (SOW), and Banjul Bible Training Center (BBTC). This would subsequently equip and empower indigenous believers to participate with the missionary God in reconciling the unreached people group to him.

IX. One finding of this study revealed the need for a holistic ministry, as one of the best methods of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim context of the West



Coast Region of The Gambia. I recommend the need for church planters to engage their communities through meeting the felt needs of broken lives and the unchurched people. This can be done through the establishment of the following amenities: Schools, Health Centres, and provision of safe water wells. The provision of these basic social amenities at affordable costs would help to transform the communities and subsequently serve as bridges in reaching Muslims.

X. The studies showed that reaching the muslims through large gatherings like crusades and outreaches could be difficult, for fear of facing persecutions from families and the Muslim communities. I recommend that pastors and church planters in the West Coast Region of The Gambia should intentionally and strategically establish small groups of three to five people in the unreached communities- with the objective of specifically targeting key influential people in that community that could be 'people of peace'. The latter will definitely serve as bridges in reaching their lost community.

In addition to this, those prayerfully and intentionally identified to be part of the given mall groups in a community, should be reached with the gospel through a Discovery Bible Studies (DBS) strategy, which would create a platform to discuss relevant life transforming issues/topics. It is apparent that, since Islam is a community-based religion, those key influential people invited to DBS, would be more courageous in identifying with those small groups, than responding to an outreach or crusade organized in that community, where they would be vulnerable to persecutions from families/ or the Muslim community. I am of the opinion that, with prayers, patience and the help of the Holy Spirit, members of the small groups, who are normally accountable to each other, would open up and eventually be courageous enough to embrace the

Christian faith. It is pertinent that the membership of such small groups should be concerned not only for the spiritual life of each other, but be sensitive to the felt needs of members of the group. Subsequently, members of that community-based group could be disciplined with the relevant teachings, which would equip them to further reach unto the lost in that community.

xi. The study pointed out the need for an incarnational church planting model with emphasis on the church planters sharing their lives and resources with the indigenes in unreached and unchurched areas of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. I suggest the need for the translation of the Bible, hymns and choruses in the local languages of the predominant ethnic groups in the West Coast Region of The Gambia namely- the Mandinka and Jola. The use of audio Bibles (proclaimers) in the local languages could also be of invaluable help in the planting of indigenous churches. This is evident from the fact that most of the inhabitants in the rural areas are illiterate.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

This project was limited in its scope as indicated inter alia. It could not shed much light on many related areas that could have enriched the findings in this work. It is against this background that, I suggest the following future areas of research that could be built on my study.

First, a study may be conducted on contextualization as a bridge to church planting in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Second, a study may be carried out on discipleship, as the fundamental principle of planting indigenous churches in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia. Third, other scholars may like to investigate the reasons why believers in

ECWA and other churches in the West Coast Region of The Gambia, move from one church to another, instead of remaining in their local churches to be disciplined?

Fourth, a study may be conducted specifically on Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in defense of their new-found faith in Christ. Fifth, other scholars may like to undertake, research on how the church planter's knowledge on the Qur'an could be used as a bridge to reach the Muslims in postmodern times. Sixth, a study may be carried out on the same topic: "Best practices by ECWA and other churches in the planting of indigenous churches, in the West Coast Region of The Gambia." but this could be done, by using different instruments and engaging more churches from various denominational backgrounds, in the rural areas of the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

### **Postscript**

When I was asked by the leadership of the DMIN Team to come up with a topic for my three years of study at Asbury Theological Seminary, I did wrestle in my mind as to what topic I should investigate on, that would serve as a legacy in the Muslim majority context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, where I have lived for over twenty years. After much prayers and meditation, I resolved on making a study on the "best practices of planting indigenous churches in my ministry context." My inadequate knowledge on Islam and the Qur'an, coupled with my inability as a non- Gambian to speak any of the local languages, initially gripped me with the fear of leaping into an unknown academic journey.

This was compounded by the fact that, no one had actually done research in The Gambia on this topic. Like any pioneer researcher on such a culturally relevant topic, challenges in different forms like- access to inadequate resource materials were

inevitable. However, I refused to be held back by these seemingly stumbling blocks in pursuing the passion that God had laid in my heart, for restoring broken lives and relationships in an unreached community, by conducting such a strategic and life transforming study in my community.

This project has subsequently served as an eye opener to me in realizing that the church as a living organism, is the vehicle to fulfill this missional mandate (Matt.28:18-20) of reaching a lost community where Muslims are an integral part (2Pet.3:9). The unprecedented rate in which Muslims are coming over to Christ in contemporary times in Muslim majority communities like the Middle East, is therefore an encouragement to me that the Muslims in my ministry context could be reached for Jesus Christ.

Through this study, I have come to understand that, planting indigenous churches in a Muslim community only demands a greater patience and love in the context of relationship- building. I have also come to realize that this missional mandate is not only limited to pastors but extends to the body of Christ in general. This has therefore shifted my theology on church planting from an exclusive focus on pastors as carriers of the biblical mandate, to the priesthood of all believers as partners in kingdom- building. Moreover, in spite of the emphasis pointed out in this study on the planting of indigenous churches in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, the role of none indigenes in church planting, cannot be left unnoticed, considering the low percentage of indigenous Christians as of now.

In the light of this, my earnest desire as a non- Gambian, is to submit to the dictates of the Holy Spirit in facilitating seminars and workshops on church planting among Muslims, not only in ECWA Churches but other denominations. Like the prophet

Isaiah my heart's cry is, "Lord, here am I send me" (Isa. 6:8) as an instrument of transformation among the unreached people groups with the unchanging message of reconciliation to the Muslims who are an integral part of God's mission.

My ultimate prayer is that God will also open the eyes of all and sundry that in spite of the challenges characteristic of church planting in the Muslim context of the West Coast Region of The Gambia, it is not about us, but about him alone who has called us, to partner with him in positively transforming our unreached communities in an ever-changing world. God is therefore not looking at our ability, but availability as partners in changing the statistics of ninety percent unreached and unchurched Muslim groups under investigation in this study. This can therefore be accomplished not primarily by identifying the best practices of church planting among the Muslims as discussed in this project, but by submitting to the leading of the Holy Spirit, in giving us the strategies of restoring broken lives and families to himself.

## APPENDIXES

### **APPENDIX A Semi structured interview items for (ten ECWA pastors and five pastors/ministers from five other churches.**

I. How do Pastors/Priests/Clergy in your denomination, plant churches/Evangelize among Muslims in the Western Division of The Gambia?

ii. What are the impacts (effects) of the current methods of church planting in your ministry context?

iii. In what ways do the current methods of church planting in your church, contribute to the planting and growth of indigenous churches in your community?

iv. What are the practical challenges/barriers to the planting of indigenous churches among the Muslims, in the Western division of the Gambia?

v. How do the barriers of church planting among Muslims, affect the indigenous church planting in your community? vi. What strategies/methods do pastors/clergy carry out to overcome challenges of church planting among Muslims?

Vii What in your opinion, are the most appropriate methods of church planting among the Muslims in your community?

viii. In what practical ways has your church been engaged in multiplying itself by the planting of indigenous churches in your Muslim community?

ix. What are the results of using the most effective methods of church planting among Muslims in your community?

x. How has your opinion of indigenous church planting among Muslims changed over the years?

**Appendix B' Focus Group questions for eight different Pastors in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.**

I.How are churches planted among the Muslims in the Western River Region of The Gambia?

II.How does the current method of church planting in your community contribute to the multiplication of indigenous churches in the Western River Region of The Gambia?

III.What are the major barriers of church planting in a Muslim context in your community?

IV.Why is church planting among the Muslims a major challenge? Explain how pastors/church planters can overcome such challenges.

V. In what practical ways should pastors in the West River Region plant indigenous churches, in a Muslim context?

**Appendix C. Focus Groups questions for (six Muslim Background Believers from different denominations)**

i. What methods of church planting was used which eventually led to your conversion from the Islamic faith to the Christian faith?

ii. What is your view on the ways and manners in which churches are planted in the Muslim community of the West Coast Region (WCR)?

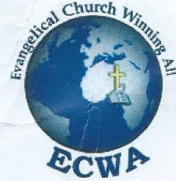
iii. What challenges are you currently faced with as a Muslim background believer?

iv. What are the barriers/challenges of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim community?

v. What in your opinion, are the best practices of planting churches among the Muslims in the West Coast Region of the Gambia (WCR)?

vi. How best can churches in a Muslim context reproduce themselves?





# EVANGELICAL CHURCH WINNING ALL

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 Tel: +220 7073588 / 9243765 / 7671522 / 2450462 / 3434288

Email: [evangelical.gambia@gmail.com](mailto:evangelical.gambia@gmail.com)

Motto: Thy words giveth light

Our Ref:.....

Your Ref:.....

10 February, 2017

Dear Pastor Jah,

Letter of Permission - Semi-Structured interview

Greetings to you in His precious name. I trust you are doing well in your family and ministry. I am delighted to inform you that, as part of the three years strategic plan (2017-2020) of the above named church, the leadership of the church resolved to identify effective methods of planting indigenous churches in the West River Region of The Gambia. This is done with the primary objective of reaching the unreached in the Muslim majority community of The Gambia in obedience to the Great Commission (Matt.28: 19-20).

In the light of the above, I have been well informed about your enrolment as a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, USA; and that you are currently working on a dissertation project purposely focused on, identifying the best practices of planting indigenous churches in ECWA and other churches in the Muslim community of the West River Region of The Gambia.

I must affirm that, your study is indeed of significant value to us as an Evangelical church. In the light of this, I have identified fifteen of my Pastors/ church planters as potential participants to respond to the ten interview questions you had sent to my office. I am confident of the ability and integrity, of each of them to respond to your questions, in the light of your three research questions included in your previous letter addressed to me.

There are also a number of historical records and other documents/Newsletters in my office that could serve as relevant resource materials pertinent to your research. In this respect, please don't hesitate to contact me or any of my pastors, if the need arises for you to make use of any these documents that may shed light on your study. Moreover, just in case you may want to make use of the church premises in the course of administering your interview questions to the participants, do feel free to contact Pastor Gabriella Koroma in this regard.

I do heartily express thanks to you and those Pastors that you would eventually recruit as research participants for your project. I am confident that, your findings will not only be relevant to my denomination but other denominational leaders and mission bodies engaged in church planting in a Muslim majority context of The Gambia.

May His grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Yours in His Service

Rev. Yohanna Turba

ECWA Co-ordinator, The Gambia.

## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE GAMBIA

### (House of Wisdom)

Sukuta, P.O. BOX 86 BJL, Email:how.gambia@gmail.com, Telephone: +220  
9913518

20<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.

Dear Pastor Jah,

#### **Approval letter-focus group study on (Muslim background believers)**

Greetings to you in His precious name.

Our mission week last year was focused on the theme: ‘finishing the task’ (Matt.24:14; Matt. 28:19-20). This gave rise to a three days Mission Conference (10-12 March 2016) at the Calvary Community Church, on church planting strategy among the Muslims. Considering the low percentage of Christians in a Muslim majority nation of The Gambia, the conference served as an eye opener to the participants from various denominational backgrounds, in the West Coast Region (WCR) of The Gambia. They were subsequently empowered with different skills and knowledge in reaching the unreached people group in their community. I was therefore filled with great delight when I received a letter in my office, in January 2017, introducing you as a Doctor of Ministry student of Asbury Theological Seminary; who is currently working on his dissertation project; that is designed to identifying the best methods of planting indigenous churches in a Muslim majority context.

In your letter, you specifically requested for me as national head and founder of the above named ministry, to recommend nine participants who are Muslim background believers that will respond as a focus group, to five interview questions. You also requested the possibility of having access to any relevant historical documents or newsletters in my office, relating to Muslim background believers and church planting.

As a Pastor to Muslim background believers for decades, it is apparent that your project is critical in my ministry context. I have therefore identified six pastors and three lay persons who are Muslim background believers in the West River Region (WRR) of The Gambia. I am confident that, a focus group study among these potential participants will definitely give you a diverse and enriching view of church planting methods among the Muslims in my ministry context.


Be assured that the recommended participants, will be of invaluable help in response to your interview questions designed for a focus group study among Muslim background believers. Please also don't hesitate to get back to me at any time the need arises for you to get access to other resource materials like bulletins, newsletters and other items/facilities in my church that may be useful to your study.

My profound thanks and gratitude is due to you, and the prospective participants whose input towards your needed data will eventually give me and other denominational leaders a wider scope and new perspectives of planting indigenous churches in a predominantly Muslim community.

Thanks for your partnership in kingdom building. Be assured of my continuous prayer and moral support.

Yours truly,

Pastor Benjamin M. Ezedimbu-Michael

 <p>Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path Ps 119:105</p>	<h2>SCRIPTURE UNION, THE GAMBIA</h2>
	<h3>F-SECTION, PIPELINE</h3>
	<p>P.O. BOX 4569, BAKAU, THE GAMBIA, WEST AFRICA</p>
	<p>TEL: (220) 9937372 / 7671522 / 7046462</p>
	<p>Email: scriptureuniongm@yahoo.com</p>
	<p>Website: www.su-international.org</p>
	<p>12<sup>th</sup> February, 2017</p>

Dear Rev/Pst/Mr/Mrs/Ms-----

**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

**BEST PRACTISE OF PLANTING INDIGENOUS CHURCHES IN THE WEST COAST REGION OF THE GAMBIA**

Greetings. You are invited to be engaged in a research study being done by Lawrence Jah a DMIN student in the church planting cohort, from Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, USA. You are invited because you a person with a wealth of experience in church planting among Muslims, in addition to your duration of service in church planting in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be asked to respond to ten interview questions that have been designed by me. In the course of the conduct of the interview please feel free to express your knowledge /experiences in response to the questions. Your responses may be followed up by further questioning to get a better understanding on what you may have said.

The interview will take place in a specific place and at a date and time agreed by you. The duration of the interview will be 30 to 50 minutes per question. This will be done twice every week until the ten questions are completed. The conduct of this research will attract no remuneration to the research participant. Please note that in the course of your responses to any of the questions I would write down some key information from you as data for this project. Moreover, with your permission, I will also do a voice recording with the help of a digital audio tape.

However, please be assured that what ever information received from you will be treated with utmost confidentiality and your identification will be anonymous to the public but exclusively known to me through the use of initials, alongside specific codes instead of your given name(s). Do feel free to ask me questions any time about this study. However, if for one reason or the other you decide at any time not to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want to.

Signing this document means you have read it or have it read to you, and that you want to be engaged in the study. If you do not want to be in the study do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you and no one will take offence if you decide not to be involved or even if you change your mind later.

Name of person agreeing to be in the study-----

Signature of Person agreeing to be in the study-----

Date signed-----

Name of Researcher-----

Signature of Researcher-----

Do feel free to get back to me either in person or telephone conversation to pick up this consent letter within the period of two weeks upon receiving this letter.

Yours truly

**Lawrence Jah**

Tel. 7671522

<p><b>National Chairman:</b> Rev. James Cole</p>	<p><b>National Director:</b> Pst. Lawrence B. Jah</p>	<p><b>National Treasurer:</b> Pst. Jonathan Dumbuya</p>
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## TYPIST CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**Title of study: Best practices of church planting methods among Muslims in the West River Region of The Gambia**

I,----- in my capacity as the ..... to the Primary Investigator (Lawrence Jah), National Director of Scripture Union Gambia, and a DMIN student in the Church Planting cohort , from the Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, USA, hereby, **agree to assist in the typing of transcribed data and any other dissertation related work,** based on a Semi Structure Interview and Focus Groups study among twenty nine(29) research participants, in the light of the above study.. By agreeing to be engaged in this study, I agree to walk in integrity and maintain full confidentiality when performing these tasks. I also understand that, it is my primary responsibility to safe guard the rights and welfare of research subjects as a key ethical consideration, and that the research participants rights and welfare take precedence over the goal and requirements of the research. I understand that I have a responsibility to honour this confidential agreement.

In the light of this, I specifically agree to:

- i. Keep all research related data shared with me by the researcher, confidential, by not discussing or divulging or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the primary investigator.
- ii. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any respondent/interviewee that may be revealed during the course of performing the research tasks.
- iii. Ensure that, no copies of any transcript/findings in any form or format is made (e.g., disks, audio digital audio tapes), unless specifically requested to do so by the primary investigator;

iv. Make sure that, the transcribed data provided by the investigator in any form/format (e.g. disks, digital audio recording hand written notes) for the purpose of typing, is held securely and can only be accessed via pass word in my lap top, kept in a cabinet with (two lockers) in my study room only accessible to me..

v. Keep all transcribed data/findings that contains identifying information in any form or format (e.g., disks, audio tapes, hand written notes,) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:

a. Keep all transcripts/findings in computer password-protected files locked in my study room at home, with keys to two set of lockers only accessible to me.

b. Close any computer programs and documents related to the typing of transcribed data/findings when temporarily away from the computer;

vi. Ensure that any personal information from the transcribed data/findings will not be disclosed to any third party in the course of carrying out my research task as stated in this document.

vii. Give, all typed transcribed data in any form or format (e.g., disks, audio tapes, hand written notes,) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research task.

viii. Return all typed transcribed data to the investigator at the earliest possible time in order to facilitate subsequent data analysis and findings by him (the researcher).

ix. Destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research task or to return said audio files to the investigator as requested by him.

Do note that, signing this document means that, you have read this or had it read to you, and that you are quite willing to be engaged in the study by strictly abiding with the terms of this confidential agreement. Any violation of this agreement would constitute serious breach of ethical standards in research and you pledge not to do so. However, if you do not want to assist the investigator in typing the transcribed data, do not sign this paper. It is actually optional to you, I will not take offence as your husband and investigator/reseacher.

Name of Typist: .....

Address: .....

Email address.....

Telephone number: .....

Signature of typist.....

Name of Primary investigator\_\_LawrenceJah

Address(office) Scripture Union Ministry, The Gambai

(home) KanifingEstate ,Srrekunda, The Gambia

Email address: lawyerus2001@yahoo.com/lawrence.jah@asburyseminary.edu

Signature of Primary Investigator.....

Date.....

Tel.00220- 7671522



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