

## **Original Research Article**

### **CHALLENGES FACING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA CHOIRS IN MAMPONG MUNICIPALITY IN ASHANTI REGION OF GHANA**

#### **ABSTRACT**

The study examined the challenges that confront Presbyterian Church of Ghana Choirs in the Asante Mampong Municipality in the Ashanti Region of Ghana and equally outlined some solutions to the challenges identified. Music directors, choristers, church members as well as church management constituted the target population out of which 74 respondents were sampled hence forming the accessible and the total population for the study. Purposive and random techniques were used to sample the respondents in six Presbyterian Church of Ghana congregations in the Asante Mampong enclave. Data was collected through interview, questionnaire and participant observation. The study however revealed some of the challenges as Lack of music directors, lack of financial motivation for the music directors and lack of financial support from church management. The rest are lack of proper attention for the choir, low enrolment of the youth in the choir and lack of succession plan, and lack of commitment on the part of choir members towards rehearsals. The study therefore suggested that the church should find a way of motivating the music directors financially so that they will remain loyal to the church; also, musicians should be constantly trained for the church. Members of the choir should always be committed towards rehearsals. Besides, church management should fully give equal attention to the church choir just as is done to the generational groups in the church. The study recommended among others that, the Presbyterian University College should introduce music courses to help train music directors for the various congregations in the Asante Mampong Municipality.

**Key words:** Challenges, Presbyterian Church, Basel mission, Church choir.

## Introduction

Music making always permeates the socio-cultural lives of Ghanaian; as music plays role in the life cycle events as well as worship in the Ghanaian society. Studies have shown that in all the major religions in Ghana, music plays a pivotal role in such religions' rituals.

According to 2010 population and housing census, Ghana is to a larger extent a religious country with about 71% of the inhabitants being inclined to Christian religion. According to Ndah (2014), music serves as a mechanism through which members of congregation in a Christian faith reach out to God. In fulfillment of the religious duties choirs and singing groups are set up in the churches to help propagate the word of God and also to uplift some of the members so that they can have good rapport with God.

Basel mission was one of the oldest churches to be established in Gold Coast (Ghana). According to Mireku et al (2007), the missionaries established the churches and schools and teaching and learning of music became core in the church and the school; this was because they trained students in music so that they come to help in the singing of hymns in the church.

So in the Presbyterian Church, there are church choirs established to lead the preacher in and out of service. They are also expected to lead in the congregational singing. In view of that, all local congregations are expected to form choirs to perform that mandate in the Presbyterian Church. All these choirs have a national association thus Presbyterian choirs' union with their own executives in the church under the Department of church life and nature.

Asante Mampong district where the focus of the study is could be located in the Ashanti region of Ghana and per the Presbyterian church of Ghana administrative regions, Mampong district is found within the Sekyere Presbytery. It is the administrative headquarters of the Sekyere presbytery. Because of the role that music plays in the propagation of the gospel in the church, it is the hope of the writers that the church choirs in Mampong will be well resourced and empowered to deliver on their mandate in the church.

## Statement of problem

Presbyterian Church choirs have been in existence for a very long time and have been leading in the musical activities in the church. But observation as choirmasters and music educators as well as empirical proofs have shown that challenges do confront the choirs in the study area but much has not been alone to air these challenges empirically so that stakeholders would come to resource the choirs to enhance performance in the church and the community at large. It is as a result of this that this study is carried out to discuss the challenges that confront the choirs hence find lasting solutions to them.

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## **Objectives of the study**

1. To discuss the challenges confronting the Presbyterian church of Ghana choirs in Mampong Municipality.
2. To propose solutions to tackle the challenges confronting Presbyterian Church choirs in Mampong Municipality.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Basel missionaries in Ghana**

The advent of works of the missionaries in the Gold Coast (Ghana) brought about establishment of churches and schools. According to Adum- Atta et al (2019), Basel missionaries were the first to arrive in the country hence establishing churches and schools with the aim of training teachers, catechist and pastors to help in the missionary work. Asare-Danso (2017) posits that, Basel mission society was formed in 1815 in Basel, Switzerland. He adds that the missionaries arrived in Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1828. He presents the early missionaries who arrived in Gold Coast as GofthliebHolzwarth, Carl F. Salbaeh, J.G Schmidt and J.P Henke. In addition, he concludes that, the missionary work finally took off from Akropong-Akwapim with music playing vital role in worship. Also in the schools, singing became an integral part of the school's activities. Andreas (2016) equally agrees that Basel Presbyterian church of Ghana is one of the oldest churches in Ghana. He shares that After Akropong, Abetifi was another station where missionary works were dominant with establishment of schools and churches as well.

### **Concept of a Choir**

There are choirs that sing at functions in society be it religious or societal events. Choir according to Acquah et al (2013) is a group of people coming together to sing. They cite example of Winneba youth choir which sings at both national and international programmes, to inform, educate and entertain.

Ndah (2022) as well shares that a choir exist when a group of people come together to sing or perform a musical piece. He continues that, a choir could be categorized based on sex, organization and instrument. He gives examples such as boys', girls' and church choirs. He argues that, church choirs for example play role in the liturgy of the various churches.

Choirs otherwords known as mixed chorus is a group of individuals coming together to experience choral singing (Aquah2013). He shares that choral singing is so vital in Ghanaian societies because it is used for functions such as, rites of passage, sporting events, advertisement as well as church liturgy.

Amuah (2013) adds that choral music which is normally performed by choirs is unique among the people of Ghana. He identifies that schools, workplaces and churches employ choral music as part of entertaining themselves.

He agrees with the earlier scholars that choral music became dominant with the arrival of the missionaries. He shares that the effects of church music in Ghana is very much felt in the church. He explains that, choir/choral performances involve people coming together to sing musical pieces with strict rules and principles that associate with choral music.

He admits that apart from the church choirs that perform the choral music, institutions outside the church such as schools, from basic to tertiary level have choirs. He explains that in the Major regions and communities of Ghana, there are choirs who promote the inclinations of the choral music. Quansah (2020) equally shares that most of the orthodox churches in Ghana have church choirs that perform to promote choral music. He identifies some of them as the Methodist, Presbyterian and the Anglican Church. He cites some of the youth choirs also as Winneba youth choir, Dansoman youth choir, Evangel youth choir and Harmonious Chorale.

### **Challenges facing choirs in Ghana**

Every institution in the world may encounter challenges in one way or the other. Music industry is no exception to that assertion. According to Acquah and Amuah (2013), one of the challenges that face choirs in Ghana is hiring of organist and choir Directors. They use Winneba youth choir as example and discuss that the choir had to rely on part-time organist and music directors which pose a challenge for the group. They add that the group is not in good position to hire and motivate qualified musicians to oversee the affairs of the choir. They state the funding of the choir as another challenge; as according to them funding comes from a kind of donations from patrons and from performances. Lack of commitment from the choristers is identified as another challenge since such attitude hinders the progress and development of the choir.

Also, ill-advice from parents equally discourages some of the members in the group. Another challenge explained is Education and transfer which send some of the members to school as well as change of work have relocation.

According to Ndah (2022) the following are some of the challenges that confront choirs in Ghana:

- Lack of trained musicians to interpret music scores pose a great challenge towards music making in the church. As a result of this development, many groups in the church do not perform to their maximum to raise standard of music.
- Lack of financial support from the church authorities. Observation has shown that institutions such as churches feel reluctant in spending on materials as well as music making in the church. They consider other issues in the church as paramount to the neglect of things that would help in rendering music in the church (such as acquiring musical instruments, costume and other logistics). In some churches the mandatory days allocated for the celebration for the musical groups to raise funds are denied them thereby weakening the financial stand of the group.

- There is a mind- set of the general public that music is for the slow learners. In view of this, many parents deter their wards from pursuing that course. That perception does not encourage the younger ones to go seriously into it to help in the music making in the church.
- Financial obligations in the musical groups as well discourage many from contributing effectively to the groups. Many of those especially students and unemployed find it difficult to pay their dues and sew their costumes.
- Life style of the members of the group as well hinder music making. The groups in the church seem to become *high time* club for the rich, in terms of their make ups and their outfit. This means that any less privilege would not feel comfortable in the group to perform
- Education system in the country currently does not prepare a sound ground for music education. Per the 2008 Act 778, music still remains in the curriculum. But at the basic level it is not examinable; and currently it is not even taught. Creative art as they called it is supposed to cover both the Visual and the Performing arts. But observation has it that, only the Visual aspect is dominant; leaving out the Performing arts that has to do with music and dance. Due to this, younger ones do not even feel its impact at the lower levels of their education let alone deciding to offer it at higher level. So many don't see the urgency or the need for the study and making of music in society.

Samtoyen (2021) also explains the following as challenges facing choirs:

Conflict within members leading to lack of team work and unity. He clarifies that such conflicts are either as a result of clash of two members or against the leader of the choir. In addition, members do not have time for rehearsals due to their business and their work schedules.

He opines also that, the choirs lack enough time for learning of new songs. Also most of the members in the choir are students; they are active and present when they are on vacation. But when they are back to school, their places in the choir become vacant.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted survey and descriptive approaches under the qualitative paradigm to discuss the challenges facing the church choirs in the jurisdiction. Purposive and Random Sampling techniques were used during the study. The study equally used mixed method thus questionnaire, interview and participant observation to collect data for the study.

The population of the study targeted music Directors, Choristers, Church members and some management members of the church. The population distribution is seen on Table 1 below:

Table 1: The population distribution

TARGET POPULATION	ACCESIBLE POPULATION
Music Directors	03
Choristers	40
Church Members	20
Church Management	11
Total = 74	

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques and judgment drawn accordingly.

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In all 20 respondents answered questionnaire and the rest were interviewed in addition to the observation by the researchers when they took part in choir's activities within the Mampong enclave.

20 church members responded to the questionnaire and their responses are as follows:

As to how long they have been in the church, 11 of them thus 55% stated 10 years and above and the rest stated varied years below 10 years.

On the challenges that confront the choirs in their congregation, 8 of them representing 40% stated lack of commitment from members, the remaining respondent stated varied challenges such as lack of support from church management and lack of money by choristers to fund themselves in the choir.

Interviews were also conducted at the congregations that are within the Mampong Municipality. The responses are discussed below:

At the Mampong Central, 20 respondents were interviewed with the help of an interview guide focusing on challenges that affect the choir and how those challenges could be solved. The breakdown of their responses is seen on Table 2 below:

Table 2: The breakdown of their responses

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Challenges	Number of respondents	Percentage
• Lack of choir master	8	40%
• Lack of support from church Management	5	25%
• Lack of commitment from Choir members	4	20%
• Lack of youth in the choir	2	10%
• Lack of money to secure Materials in the choir	1	5%

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On the way forward to how the challenges could be solved, they suggested that, the church should always secure music directors for the choirs so that teaching and learning of songs move smoothly in the choir. They stated also that, church management should take responsibility of funding the choir, raise funds for the choir regularly and make sure the music week that is allocated for the choir on the Almanac should be strictly observed. In addition, they discussed that; choristers should occasionally be counseled so that their commitment level in the choir would be high.

They added that, old members in the choir should nature the younger ones so that they can transit successfully into the church choir. On securing materials in the choir, they suggested that, church management should subsidize the cost of such materials so that members could pay little to secure such items.

At Mampong Newtown, 10 respondents were interviewed on the challenges confronting the choirs and ways through which such challenges could be solved. The following responses were obtained; seen on table 3 below:

Table 3: The following responses were obtained

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Challenges	Number of respondents	Percentage
• Some church policies against the choir. Example the choir been seen as an interest group	2	20 %
• Lack of choirmasters	4	40%
• Low enrolment of choristers	3	30 %
• Lack of youth in the choir	1	10 %

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As to how the above challenges could be solved, they made the point that, the notion of the choir being an interest group should be erased among the leadership of the church because music holds a special place in ministering and propagation of the word of God in the churches; so the choir must equally be giving recognition just like the generational groups.

The church management should look for choirmasters to handle the choirs in the church, trained some and motivate them financially. On enrolment, they suggested that, they should start the campaign from the junior youth so that they would graduate into the choir. They also advised that, rules in the choir should be made more flexible to take care of the needs of the youth. And with that, more would be attracted to join the choir.

Table 4: At Mampong Abrukutuaso, 16 members were interviewed and their concerns are herein discussed

Challenge	Respondents	Percentage
• Lack of trained musicians	2	13 %
• Lack of motivation from church Management	3	19 %
• Lack of support for musical activities By church management	4	25 %
• Inadequate youth in the choir	4	25 %
• Lateness and absenteeism from members	3	19 %

On the way of solving the challenges, they suggested that church management should sponsor those interested. In musical activities in the church to go train at music institutions and come back and handle choir and other music groups in the church. They also advise that, church management should set aside some funds for motivating music directors as well choir members, so that their morale will be boosted to serve the choir better. Also church session should be ready to financially sponsor the choir in diverse ways. Besides, the children at junior youth should be counseled so that they can join the choir. Choir

executives should set up their bye-laws to forbid members from coming to practice late and also minimizing absenteeism.

Ten church members were also interviewed at Dahoo Congregation. These are their responses shown on table 5.

Table 5: Responses of Ten church members

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Challenge	Number of respondents	Percentage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of trained musicians in 3</li> </ul>	3	30%
The church		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of commitment from Choir members</li> </ul>	2	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of remuneration for Choirmasters</li> </ul>	3	30 %
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of financial support from church leadership</li> </ul>	2	20 %

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In solving the challenges stated above, they suggested that, the church should find a way of training musicians in the church and also motivate them financially so that they could be retained to serve the church for a longer period. In addition, periodic seminar and talks should be given choir members so that they become committed to serving the choir. Also, church leadership should adopt the choir as a property of the church hence attends to their needs.

New Damang produced 11 respondents who reacted to the interview and came out with the following as represented on table 6 below:

Table 6: New Damang produced 11 respondents who reacted to the interview

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Challenge	Number of respondents	Percentage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of music directors</li> </ul>	4	36 %
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lateness and absenteeism</li> </ul>	3	27 %
From members		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of financial support from church leadership</li> </ul>	4	36%

They however suggested that the church should find a way to train the youth who have interest in music and pay them enough allowance so that they can stay and serve the church. In addition, choirs should have their rules and implement them to discourage lateness and absenteeism. Furthermore, church leadership should take full responsibility of the choir and sponsor their activities.

10 respondents at Ninting equally express their thoughts on the subject under investigation and their views are tabulated on table 7 below:

Table 7: 10 respondents at Ninting equally express their thoughts on the subject under investigation and their views

Challenge	Number of respondents	Percentage
• Lack of music directors	5	50 %
• Lack of funds for choir activities <sup>3</sup>		30%
• Lack of interest among the youth to join the choir	2	20 %

They also discussed that, musicians should be raised and trained at the expense of the church so that they can remain in the church and serve the choir. Furthermore, church leadership should often sponsor the activities of the choir financially. They also discussed that the old members in the choir should be friendly to the younger ones hence convince them to join the choir.

The researchers as well through participant observation as music directors identified that among the Presbyterian church choirs in the study area, the few music directors or choir masters are not well taken care of by the church; and when other denominations come for them and financially resource them well enough, they remain loyal to them and serve at that denominations leaving the Presbyterian choirs.

Also, some utterances of the members towards their own colleagues discourage members especially the youth from joining the choir.

It has equally been observed that, lack of succession plan for recruiting younger members into the choir is a big challenge (example Members of junior Youth graduating into the choir). The above assertion has been confirmed by the Music Directorate at the 64<sup>th</sup> national delegate conference where they agreed on formation of junior choirs to be feeding the senior choirs. In addition, the church observes the choir as an interest or service group and as a result much

attention is not given to it as is done to the generational groups in the church. Also, conservative attitude of the older members of the choir seeking not to embrace modern technology in management of the choirs equally scares the younger members who wish to join the choirs away.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The study revealed that, the Presbyterian Church choirs in Mampong enclave have challenges that confront them. Some of these challenges are discuss below:

Lack of trained / inadequate music directors/ choirmasters to oversee teaching and learning of songs in the choir; has been identified as one of the challenges. And as a result, most of the choirs relax and become dormant.

In addition, there is no financial motivation for the few music directors that are available. Church management always cries of lack of funds and due to that, the few music directors around seek greener pastures at sister churches that seems to financially motivate them enough hence they remain loyal to them.

Furthermore, lack of commitment from the choir members hinders effective teaching and learning in the choir. Lateness and absenteeism to and from practices respectively hinder the progress and growth of the choirs.

Also, lack of financial support from church management serve as a challenge to the choir. There are instances where individual members of the choir are asked to finance the activities in the choir alone. A phenomenon that discourages them especially those that feel they cannot afford.

Low enrolment of the youth in the choirs poses another challenge to the choir. Many of the members in the choirs are older persons and needed to be supported by the younger persons. But the younger ones focus only on their generational groups activities at the detriment of the choir.

Besides, too much attention giving to generational groups more than the service or the interest groups. Because the choir is regarded as an interest group, much attention is not granted them and that demoralizes the spirit of the members of the church.

Another challenge identified was the behavior of members of the choir towards each other which sometimes affect work output of the choir. Also some members of the choir are so conservative and would not adapt to any new change that could help in the management of the choir. The challenges identified confirmed the assertion of Amuah and Acquah (2013). Samtoyen (2021) and Ndah (2022).

The study however revealed some remedies that could help solve the challenges identified above. They are herein presented:

Local congregations should have scholarship schemes to train their members who are interested in the musical activities in the church. Such persons could be sponsored to read music courses at the Universities such as University of Ghana, Legon, University of Cape Coast, University of Education, Winneba, Valley View University and E.P University College, all in Ghana; so that they would come out fully equip to handle the choirs in the churches.

Churches should find a better way of raising funds to financially motivate the music directors in the various choirs so that they would be willing to give off their best and remain at post at the Presbyterian churches to serve.

There should be periodic seminar and counseling sessions for members of the choirs. They should be made to understand that, they supposed to be loyal and committed to the activities of the choir. In addition, internal laws of the choirs must be applied to serve as a deterrent to other deviant members.

Management and session of various congregations should acknowledge that, the choir belongs to the church and therefore the upkeep of the choir must be the responsibility of the church. Financial support must often be given to the choir so that even the less privilege in the choir should feel comfortable to remain in the choir.

There should be succession plan for the choir where church management must encourage enrolment drive; the younger ones must graduate from children service to junior youth and into the Choir; so that enrolment would always be high with the active youth.

Equal attention must be given to the service or interest group. They play crucial role in the service of the church so they must be given full recognition to operate fully to raise standard of singing in the church.

Members must be educated to realize that; time is a great asset in life hence must not be wasted. Rehearsal times must therefore be kept promptly so that active time would be used to teach and learn songs.

### **Conclusion**

Presbyterian Church of Ghana choirs in the Asante Mampong Municipality were studied in relation to the challenges that confront the choirs and their respective solutions to counter the challenges. Some challenges such as lack of music directors, lack of support from church management, lack of commitment from choir members, low enrolment were identified. The study however outlined respective solutions to the challenges outlined.

Recommendations

1. Local congregations should write to the Headquarters so that a certificate course in music is introduced at the Presbyterian University so that local congregations could sponsor their members there to train and become professional music directors.
2. The Headquarters should regularize the allowances of the music directors so that at least they are resourced enough to handle music activities in the church.
3. Congregations should find innovative ways of raising funds to support the activities of the choirs under their jurisdiction.
4. The youth should be encouraged to join the choir to keep it so active.
5. Leadership of the church must organize periodic seminars and workshops for choirs so that technology and innovations could be learnt to enhance the activities of the choir

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