

Analysis of the Composition and Rituals of the Repentance and Holiness Church in Kenya

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Abstract: *The repentance and holiness (RHC) church in Kenya is a prophet healing church which has attracted people from all walks of life. It was founded by Prophet Dr. David Edward Owour and is among the new emerging trends that appeared on the scene in Kenya in 2004. Following extensive fieldwork, this article seeks to ascertain the membership composition of Repentance and Holiness Church, the leadership and organization of RHC, the rituals and their significance including worship, baptism, laying on of hands, and the use of the bible in reference to faith healing, prophecy. The study shall show that RHC has a following by people from all walks of life, the educated and non-educated, Hindus and Muslims. The findings indicate that RHC leadership is managed through the prophet, the bishops and the overseers. It shall also show that baptism*

and the laying on of hands are important for the members even as the bible is central for the prophetic healings.

1. Background

African Indigenous Movements rely on pivotal salvation, on self appointed pastors, preachers and healers. Their aim is not only to evangelize to non believers or members of other faiths; on the contrary, they target those who are already Christians regardless of their denominations. During the last twenty years, there has been a tremendous explosion of new religious movements in Africa, open air rallies, crusades, revival gatherings, miracle centers and healing ministries. Nandi says that new religious movements among churches are a perplexing phenomenon as they are merely viewed as an expression of African protest against colonial domination and exploitation (Nandi, 1993).

Besides, new religious movements emphasize the conversion experience rather than doctrinal faith. Healing and deliverance feature prominently in their worship. Lifting up of hands, dancing, clapping and lively music are always a feature of their services. Testimonies are given during the event and great importance is placed on witnessing afterwards (Nyaundi, 2004; Shorter and Njiru, 2001). They also assert that there is attraction of the marvelous, the promise of miracles and cures, and the expectation of spiritual gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues. People are also attracted to the drama of deliverance from evil spirits. They further state that the fundamentalism of Pentecostalism is highly attractive to many. People want simple explanations and solutions. They are impatient of any sophisticated theological culture as exemplified in mainstream churches. Nyaundi (2003) argues that attraction to religion has been identified as the single activity which distinguishes humankind from animal kingdom. He emphasizes that religion performs a function of tackling perennial questions of existence and not even the strongest ideology is able to replace it (Nyaundi 2003).

RHC is a prophet healing church that was founded by Prophet Dr. David Edward Owour. It is among the new emerging trends that appeared

on the scene in Kenya in 2004. Its activities still feature prominently in both print and electronic media. The headquarters are based at Njoro, Nakuru West district; Nakuru County near Jesus is Lord Radio Children's Home. Jesus is Lord Worship team is the official group that leads worship in all repentance meetings. The team comprises mostly of former street children, who once lived in the streets sniffing glue, taking drugs and committing all forms of vices for survival. This team has been instrumental in the revival fire that is sweeping across the nation of Kenya and spilling into other countries (Repentance and Holiness Magazine, 2006).

There has been mass attraction of people from all walks of life to Repentance and holiness Church including those from the mainline churches, the educated and non-educated alike. Surprisingly, even professors, doctors and other prominent people in Kenya are flocking to Repentance and Holiness Church open air meetings and church services. The church draws its membership from other faiths; the most vulnerable are the Muslims and Hindus, both from within the country and the diaspora. Worse still, pastors from mainline and most Pentecostal churches have either abandoned their churches or broken away with a section of the flock to join Repentance and Holiness Church.

The study objectives were To ascertain the membership composition of Repentance and Holiness Church ; To identify the rituals and their significance including worship, baptism, laying on of hands, burial and marriage in Repentance and Holiness Church ; With reference to faith healing, prophecy and the use of the Bible, to examine the factors which attract a large following to Repentance and Holiness Church. Consequently, the following questions guided the study: What are the membership composition of Repentance and Holiness Church? What are the various rituals and their significance in Repentance and Holiness Church? To what extent have faith healing, prophecy and the use of the bible contributed to a large following in Repentance and Holiness Church?

2. Methodology

The study was confined to prophecy and healing in Repentance and Holiness Church, while paying special attention to the factors attracting large crowds to RHC. The study was carried out in Njoro in Nakuru West District, Nakuru County, Kenya. In the study the founder and prophet, bishop and only a representative sample of pastors, and members were involved in the study. The bishop and pastors were selected to give detailed accounts of the theology of Repentance and Holiness Church, while the members were targeted to determine reasons for the large membership in the Church. Information was collected by means of questionnaires, interview schedules, focused group discussion and participatory observations. One hundred and three questionnaires were administered to respondents. The information collected was analyzed to determine the frequencies and influence of prophecy and healing on respondents' attitude towards the church. Their responses were coded and collated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

However, the study was limited due to a number of factors including the fact that, though many scholars have researched on African independent movements in Kenya, little has been done on RHC since its inception in 2004. As a result there is a paucity of literary information with regard to this Church. The study relied upon the scantily published information in the national magazines whose authorship was the founding Prophet.

3. Membership

Membership structure

The duration of membership by respondents was varied. 11.9% had been members for 0-2 years, 23.8% for 2-4 years, 49.9% for 4-6 years and 12 11.9% for 6 years and above. 2.9% of members did not respond. Only 11.7% of them had been members for less than two years or more than six years. This may suggest that people leave the church in the long run. In addition, only 2.9% were in leadership positions. With regard to sex, the majority were females. In fact, 58% were female while 42% were male.

From the above analysis, women it seems lean towards an empirical rather than a rational basis for faith.

Reasons behind large attraction to RHC

An array of reasons was adduced by the respondents as their reasons for joining the church including faith healing, curiosity, fulfillment of prophecies and worship and dancing sessions. 82% of the respondents indicated that the cause of large following was the faith healing associated with the church. Approximately 12% attributed the cause to curiosity, 6% to fulfilled prophecies and 3% to worship and dancing in this church. From the above analysis, faith healing (76.9%), curiosity (11.7%), fulfilled prophecy(5.8%) and worship and dancing(2.9%) in that order, werethe underlying reasons given by respondents to joining the church.

When the respondents were asked to speculate why other members were attracted to the church, divergent views were recorded (table 1). Respondents were asked to indicate the major factors that attract many people to Repentance and Holiness Church. Their responses are tabulated below.

Table 1: Respondents perceptions of the reasons behind large attraction to RHC

<i>Response</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
Physical and Spiritual healing	78	75.7
Praise and worship team led by Jesus is Lord radio	1	1.0
Great crusades led by prophet Owuor	4	3.9
Repentance and rapture	4	3.9
Physical needs e.g. food, financial assistance, clothes	7	6.8
No response	9	8.7

A major factor that attracts people to RHC is physical and spiritual healing whose respondents were 78 (75.7%). 7 (6.8%) respondents indicated

that physical needs e.g. food, financial assistance, clothes attracted people to the church. 4 (3.9%) respondents indicated that Repentance and Rapture attract people to this church; and great crusades led by prophet Owuor respectively attracted people to the church. Only 1 (1%) respondent indicated that Praise and worship team led by Jesus is Lord radioattracted people to the church. 9 (8.7%) people did not respond. Those who did not respond represent those who went to RHC meetings as critics, to judge the messenger (prophet) and the message. However, Dr. David Owuor has severally said that men may combat and defy the logic of the message, they may resist his appeals to the nation, but that a life of disinterest in repentance leads to judgement, was an argument they could not gainsay.

Another question posed to the respondents sought to know whether prophecies foretold by the prophet attract people to the church. 65 (63%) respondents said yes, 37 (36%) respondents said no and 1 (1%) person did not respond. The results were charted above. Prophecies foretold by prophet Owuor have played a great role in attracting many followers to RHC for example the asian tsunami prophecy of November 24th 2004 was fulfilled on December 26th 2004. The Katrina prophecy of July 20th 2005 was fulfilled on August 29th 2005. The stunning prophecy about the bloodshed in Kenya that was prophesied at the Gusii stadium on October 8th 2005, where he said ‘... I see blood flowing in Kenya and columns of people walking away from home...’ was fulfilled in the post-election violence of 2008.

When the people hear that the prophecies are fulfilled they develop the urge to join RHC. Those 36% who said No, feel that the prophet is Godsent and they do not consider the fulfilled prophecies as an attraction. They are attracted by the message of repentance and holiness, because the church is preparing for the coming of the Messiah. The 1% who did not say Yes or No are either unbiased or undecided. To them, both the message of repentance and holiness and prophecies being fulfilled are the same.

4. Who Joins RHC

A true/ false statement “Only non-believers join RHC” was given to respondents. Their responses are tabulated below.

Table 2: Only non-believers join RHC

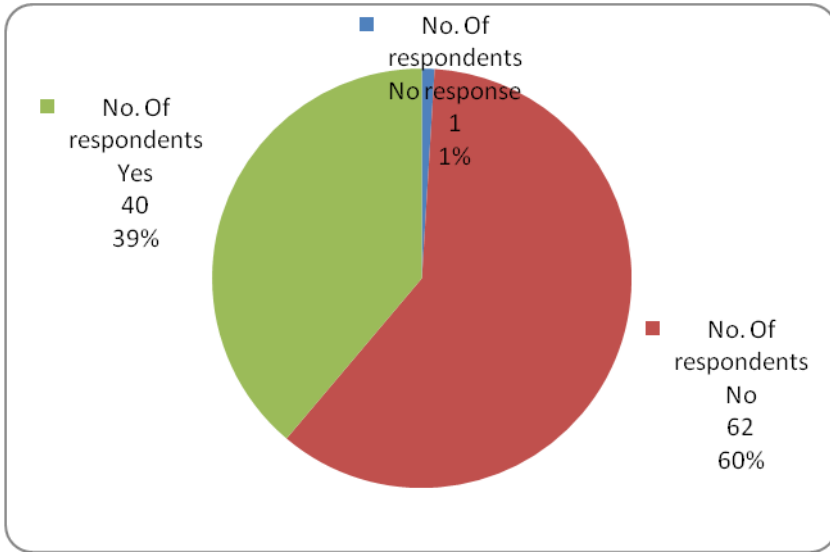
	No. Of respondents	Percent
No response	7	6.8
False	93	90.3
True	3	2.9
Total	103	100.0

A majority of the respondents (90.3%) indicated that most of the people who join RHC are already believers. Only 2.9% indicated the contrary. 6.8 % did not respond to the question and this represents those who may not be members but would have come for purposes of healing miracles then return to their churches. Some may be traditionalists who are onlookers and do not comprehend what is taking place. The main target of RHC is not non-believers. This may mean that the believers who move from the mainstream churches do not get spiritual or physical needs from their churches.

5. The New Converts

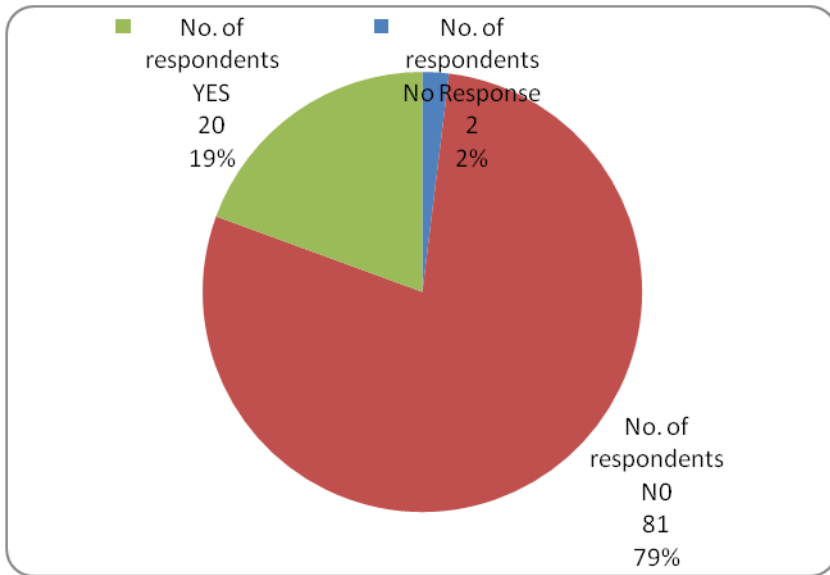
Two Yes/No questions were given to respondents. One required them to indicate whether those who got saved during RHC meetings ever go back to their churches. Another one required them to indicate whether healed individuals ever go back to their churches. A third question required then to give one reason for the answer to the above. The results to these three questions are charted and tabulated below.

Chart 1: Whether those who get saved during repentance and holiness meetings ever go back to their churches.



60% of the respondents answered 'Yes', 30% 'No' and 1% did not respond. From the above analysis, most of those who get saved during repentance and holiness meetings (60%) do not go back to their churches. This may indicate that the new members from other churches find RHC solving their problems. However, the 39% respondents who said No, were in agreement with the fact that people who get saved during repentance and holiness meetings go back to their churches. Some may not have understood the meaning of salvation, but were led to confession because of the crowd that confessed the Lord Jesus as their savior. Others could be members of Anglican or Catholic churches who are deeply rooted in their church doctrines hence not easily moved by the new doctrines.

Chart 2: Whether healed individuals ever go back to their churches



The 79% respondents who answered No, indicated that they go to RHC to seek for physical healing only but not for membership. The large crowds seen in prophet Owour’s meetings comprises people with diverse problems and needs but once they are met, the individuals have no business with the prophet.

Table 3: Main reason for not going back to their churches

<i>Reason</i>	<i>No. Of Respondents</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No response	9	8.7
They acknowledge that God's healing power is only found in this church	13	12.6
They are contented	26	25.2
God answers prayer in this church	6	5.8

They are attracted by the miracles and preaching of the prophet	26	25.2
They are happy because God has healed them	6	5.8
They are afraid of suffering again	1	1.0
The church and people are loving and caring	1	1.0
they are not allowed	1	1.0
It's not easy to abandon one's church	7	6.8
Some people are not moved by miracles	1	1.0
their needs are met here	2	1.9
They are only after healing not membership	4	3.9
Total	103	100.0

Reasons for people not going back to their churches, given in descending order are:

1. They are content with RHC (26 respondents)
2. They are attracted by the miracles and preaching of the prophet (26 respondents)
3. They acknowledge that God's healing power is only found in this church (13 respondents)
4. They feel that God answers prayers in this church (6 respondents)
5. They feel happy because God has healed them (6 respondents)
6. Their needs are met in RHC (2 responses)
7. They are afraid of suffering again (1 response)
8. The church and people are loving and caring (1 response)
9. They are not allowed (1 response)

Some respondents responded negatively as indicated below:

Some go back since it is not easy to abandon one's church (7 respondents)

Some do not leave their churches. They are only after healing not membership (4 responses)

Some go back to their churches since they are not moved by miracles (1 response)

9 respondents did not respond to the question.

From the above analysis, three main reasons given by respondents that make healed individuals not to go back to their churches are attraction by miracles and preaching of the prophet (25.2%), contentment (25.2%) and acknowledgment that God's healing power is only found in Repentance and Holiness Church. Some of the healed individuals return to their churches because they are only interested in miracles and not in membership.

6. Membership IN RHC

The question posed to members was; 'who are the majority members in RHC?'. The responses are tabulated below.

Table 4: Majority members in RHC

	No. Of Respondents	Percent
No response	3	2.9
Men	23	22.3
Women	50	48.5
children	20	19.5
Youth	7	6.8

	No. Of Respondents	Percent
No response	3	2.9
Men	23	22.3
Women	50	48.5
children	20	19.5
Youth	7	6.8
Total	103	100.0

From the above analysis, 50 (48.5%) of the respondents indicates that a majority of the members of RHC are women, 23 (22.3%) indicated that majority members are men, 20 (19.5%) indicated children to be the majority and 7 (7.8%) said youth make the majority. 3 (2.9%) people did not respond. This shows that majority of the members are women. This is because most women especially widows and single mothers attend prophet Owuor's meeting for material benefits as indicated in the Focused Group Discussion. For example carry with them their children to the meeting because they are provided for with food for three consecutive days. Thereafter the left over food is distributed among them. The prophet also gives them money to meet their financial needs.

Women in particular are attracted to this church because of deep seated marital problems. Most women are vulnerable, though educated, their husbands tend to dominate most of the family resources, for instance land, money and other wealth. Women's presence is much felt in the kitchen. Most decisions are undertaken by men; so when they go to church and the leader recognises them by giving them leadership roles, it boosts their morale.

Respondents had also been asked to briefly state one important reason why they answered as they did in the question above. Their responses are indicated in the table below.

Table 5: Reason why women are the majority

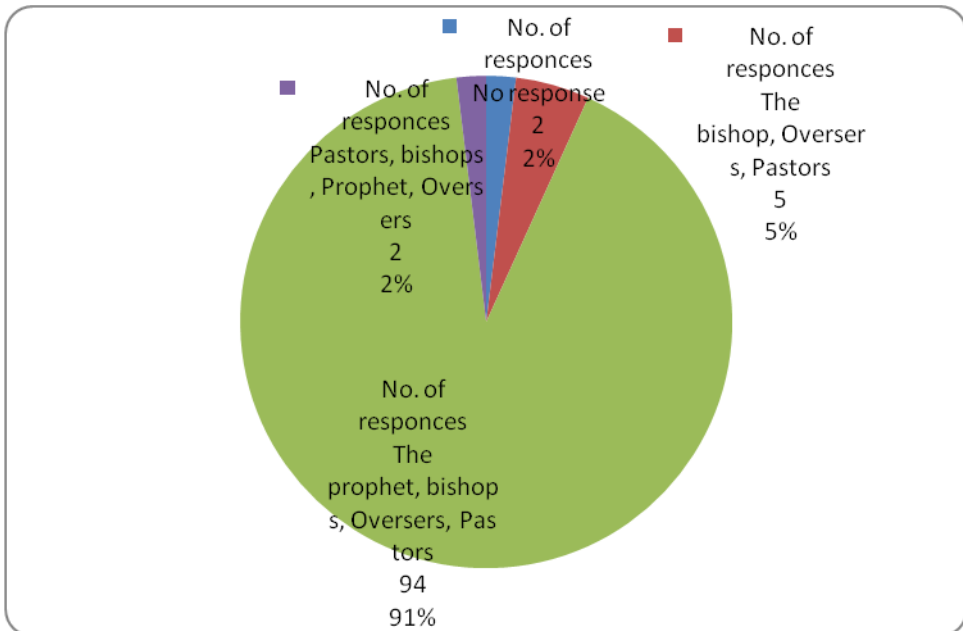
	No. Of respondents	Percent
No response	14	13.6
They are the most vulnerable to worldly temptations	1	1.0
They are more serious with spiritual matters	17	16.5
Women are able to accept the message of the prophet	8	7.8
They got the first call to repentance	13	12.6
They are ready to repent before men	4	3.9
Are attracted by praise and worship team	10	9.7
They serve without discrimination	2	1.9
Are anxious to discover new things	3	2.9
Easily convinced by miracles and preaching of the prophet	23	22.3
The prophet loves young people and blesses them so much	2	1.9
Other groups fear the rules	1	1.0
They are good observers of church doctrine	2	1.9
This church preaches the truth	2	1.9
Are after leadership positions in the church	1	1.0
Total	103	100.0

From the above table, respondents indicated that women are the majority members because they are easily convinced by miracles (22.3%), they are more serious with spiritual matters (16.5%) and they got the first call to repentance (12.6%). Women also have deep seated psychological problems and hope to find a solution to them through miracles. They hope that divine intervention will provide a solution to their myriad problems.

Women are vulnerable to worldly temptations and new things; the reason behind this is because they go through many challenges in marriage. Men from the African point of view naturally dominate women in various ways. For instance, they are decision makers, bread winners while women are home makers. If a woman is educated and able to work in the public sector, their money is controlled by men. The women are sole baby sitters while men are outgoing. Whenever they find a chance to be appreciated in the church, they are overwhelmed and are carried away; hence they spend most of their lifetime serving God and the servants of God faithfully. The idea of repentance serves a psychological role, releases stress from them. They feel relieved when they cry to God. By the time they return home, they feel relieved and calm in their minds and hearts. The Prophet handles them with care and love, he refers to the as precious women of God, daughters of Abraham, servants of God, women of Jehovah; such praises soothes their hearts, hence the love of Prophet's Owuor's meetings and church.

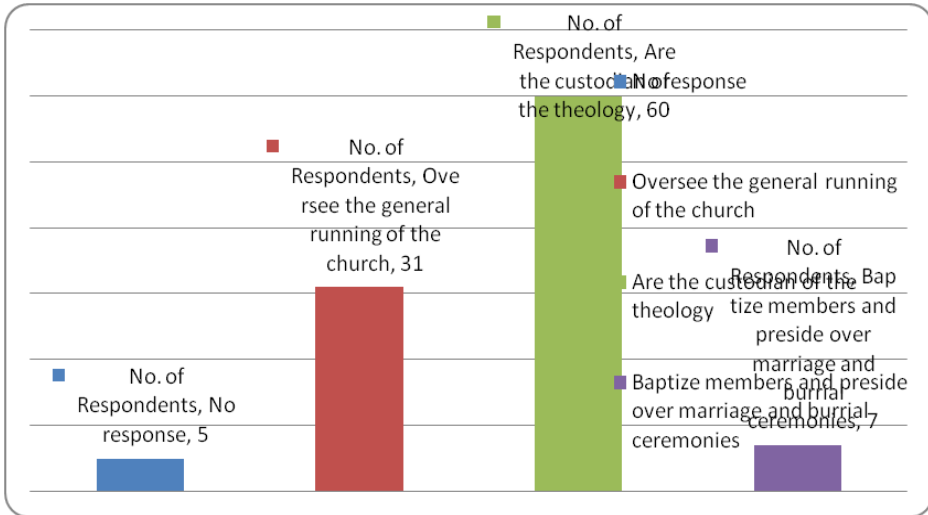
7. Leadership and Organization

Chart 3: Leadership hierarchy in RHC



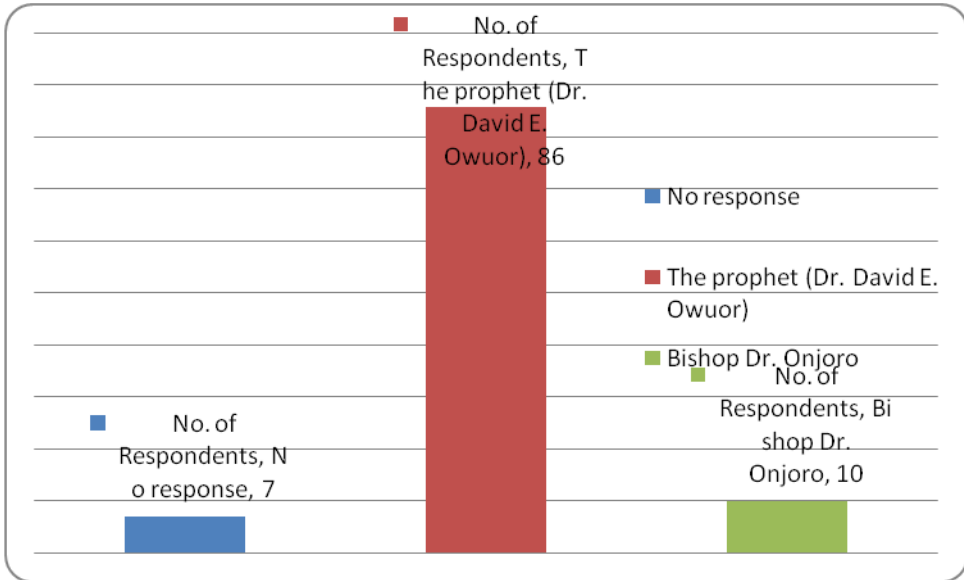
A multiple choice question was set for respondents to choose the hierarchy/order in leadership in RHC. 94 respondents (91%) indicated the hierarchy to be the prophet, bishops, overseers, pastors; 5 respondents (5%) indicated it to be the bishop, overseers, pastors; and 2 respondents (2%) indicated it to be pastors, bishops, prophet, overseers; and 2 (2%) respondents did not respond.

Chart 4: Role of Bishops and overseers



Another multiple choice question required them to choose the statement that best explains the role of the bishops and overseers in RHC. 60 (58%) respondents indicated that these leaders are the custodians of the RHC theology. 31 (30%) of them indicated that Bishops and Overseers oversee the general running of the church. 7 (7%) respondents indicated that these leaders baptize members and preside over marriage and burial ceremonies. 5 (5%) respondents did not respond.

Chart 5: Ordination of leaders



Respondents had been asked to indicate who ordains the leaders in RHC. 86 (83%) indicated that the prophet ordains leaders. 10 (10%) respondents indicated that Dr. Paul Onjoro does that. 7 (7%) respondents did not respond. The results were charted above.

The respondents were asked to indicate how one qualifies to be a bishop in RHC.

Table 6: Qualification to be a bishop in RHC

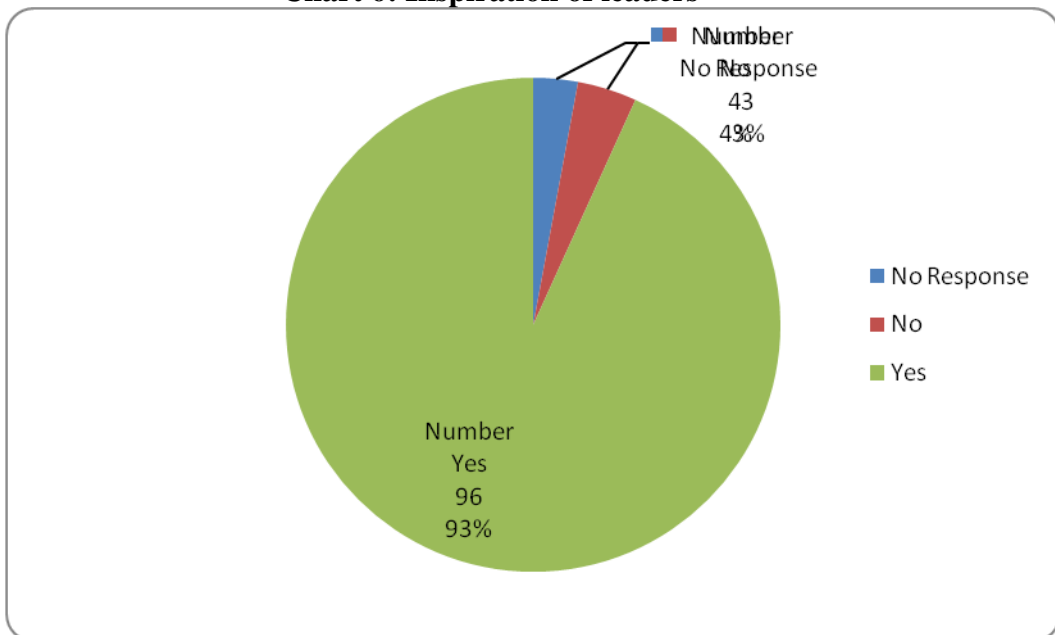
	Number	Percent
No response	1	0.9

He/she must be saved, a regional overseer, very committed to the church and reliable leader	83	80.6
Saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, obedient to the Holy Spirit and obedient to the Prophet	11	10.7
Spirit filled and ready to carry his/her cross every day and serve the people	4	3.9
A close associate of the prophet	4	3.9
Total	103	100.0

From the table above, 83 (80.6%) respondents indicated that he/she must be saved, a regional overseer, very committed to the church and reliable leader. 11 (10.7%) indicated that one should be saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, obedient to the Holy Spirit and obedient to the Prophet. 4 (3.9%) indicated that one should be Spirit filled and ready to carry his/her cross every day and serve the Lord. 4 (3.9%) said that one should be a close associate of the prophet respectively. One person did not respond. The results are given in the table below.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether church leaders were inspired by God.

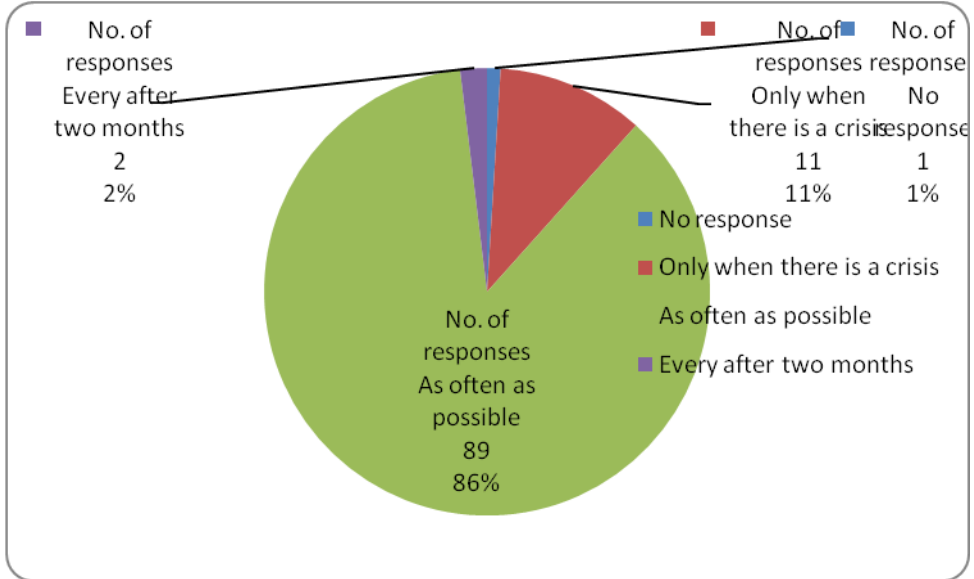
Chart 6: Inspiration of leaders



96 (93%) of the respondents answered ‘Yes’ and 4 (3.9%) answered no. 3 respondents did not respond to this question. The results are charted above.

A question was posed to find out how often the top management assesses the activities of the church.

Chart 7: Top management assessment of the various activities in church



The analysis indicates that top management assess the various activities in the church as often as possible. 89 of the respondents (86.4%) indicated that it is done as often as possible, 11 respondents (10.9%) indicated that it is done only when there is a crisis, 2 (1.9%) respondents indicated that it is done every after two months, and 1 (1.8%) did not respond. The results are represented in the chart above.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the type of punishment or discipline is given to a leader or member who commits an offense. This analysis is represented in the table below

Table 7: Type of punishment or disciplinary action is taken against a leader or a member who commits an offence.

Response	Number	Percent
No response	4	3.9
Excommunicated from the church	5	4.9
Rebuked openly and forced to repent, then restored immediately	78	75.7
One is suspended two months then faces the bishop or pastor for questioning	4	3.9
The punishment depends on the offence committed	12	11.6
Total	103	100.0

78 (75.7%) respondents indicated that the person is rebuked openly and forced to repent, then restored immediately. 12 (11.6%) respondents indicated that the punishment depends on the offense committed, 5 (4.9%) indicated that the person is excommunicated, 4 (3.9%) respondents indicated that one is suspended two months then faces the bishop or pastor for questioning, and 4 (3.9%) did not respond.

In general, leaders in RHC are said to be naturally endowed with the skill of leadership while others are inspired by the Holy Spirit. In most cases the prophet identifies the talents of leadership in people and appoints them. The leaders in this church are held with high esteem by the members because they are believed to bear the anointing of God.

8. Rituals

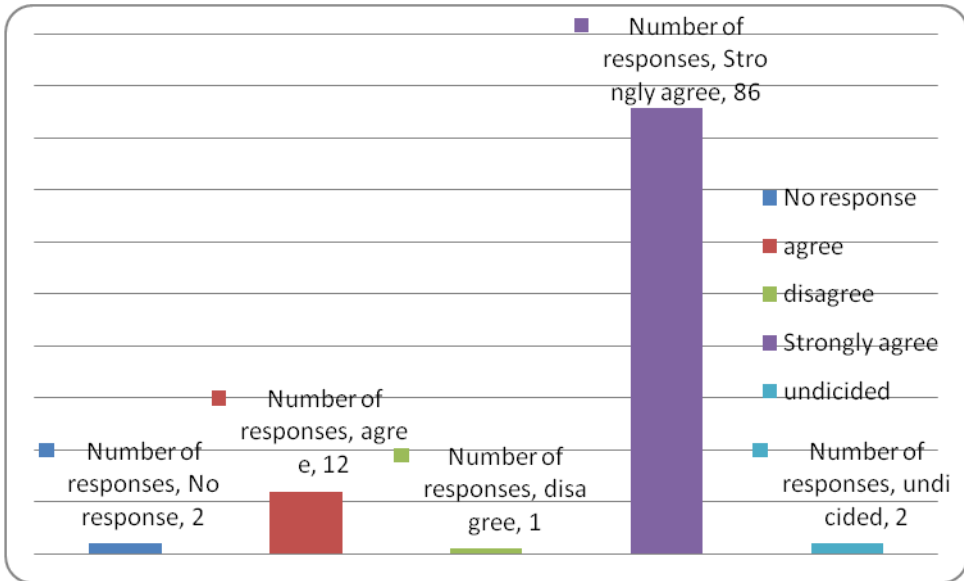
Rituals such as baptism, laying on of hands, clapping hands while worshipping God, supplication in prayer, play an important role in attracting a large crowd to RHC. The ritual of baptism is by immersion in much water. This is mandatory to all members of RHC since they believe that it cleanses one from sins and also during this time the victims get filled with the Holy Spirit. Laying hands on people by leaders, leads to deliverance and instant healing.

Respondents were given five items from which they were to respond by ticking one of the alternatives from: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree and undecided, Responses to these items are summarized in the charts below.

8.1. Baptism

Respondents were requested to indicate whether baptism by immersion in a pool if water is highly recommended to all members. These figures are summarized in the chart below.

Chart 8: Whether Baptism by immersion in a pool of water is highly recommended to all members

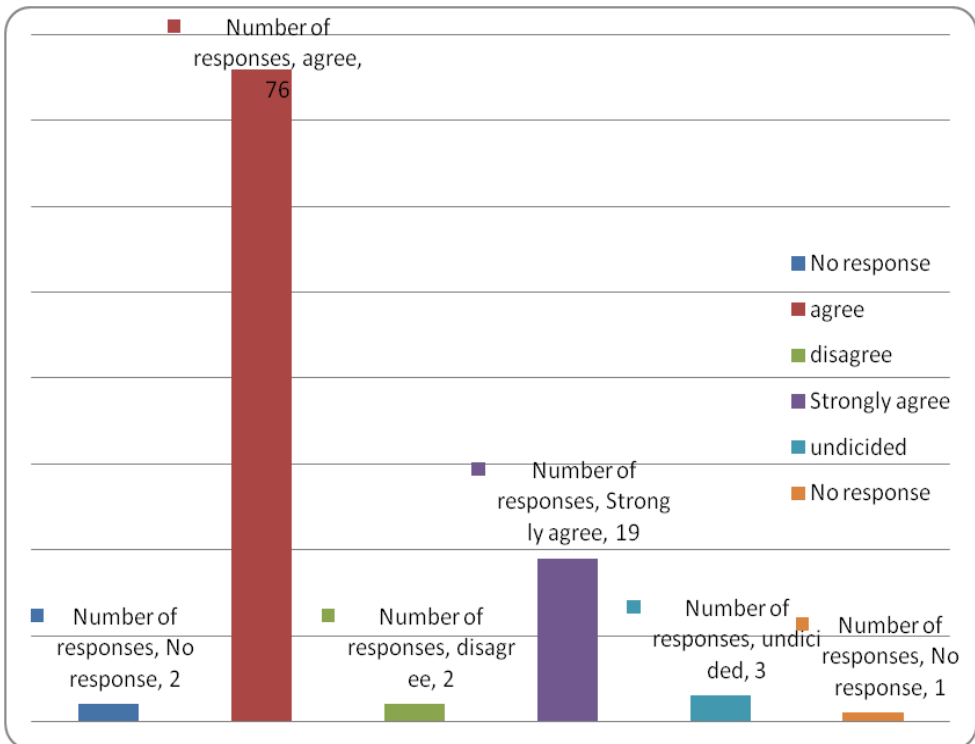


86 (83.5%) respondents strongly agree that Baptism by immersion in a pool of water is highly recommended to all members, 12 (11.7%) agree, 2 were undecided, 1 disagree and two did not respond.

8.2. Laying on of hands

Respondents were requested to indicate whether laying on of hands brings healing, comfort and peace to believers. The information is summarized in the chart below.

Chart 9: Whether Laying of hands brings healing, comfort and peace to believers

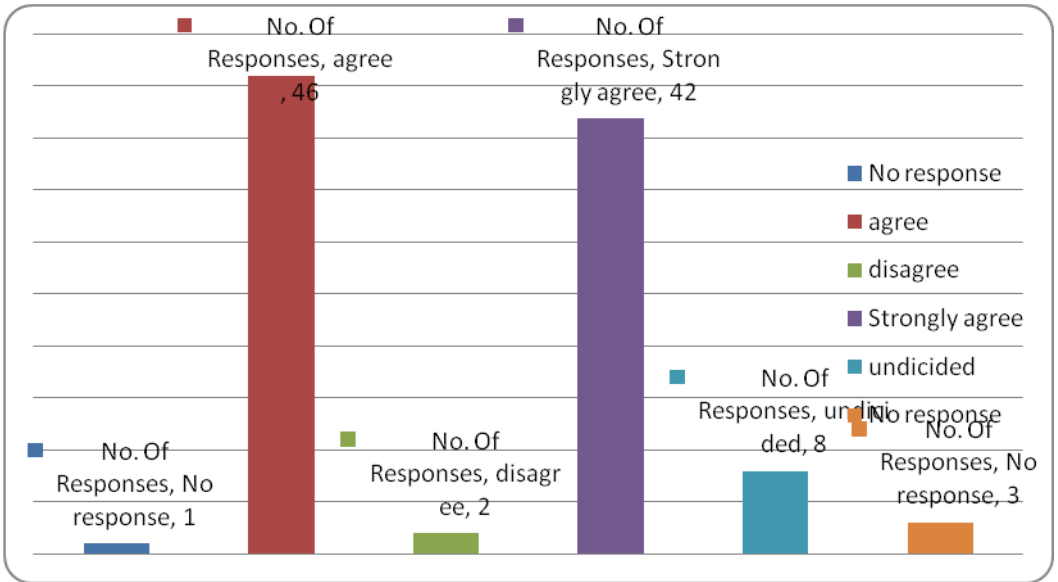


76 (75%) respondents strongly agree that Laying of hands brings healing, comfort and peace to believers, 19 (18%) respondents agree, 3 (3%) were undecided, 2 (2%) disagree and 2 (2%) did not respond.

8.3. Praying

Respondents were requested to indicate whether Praying with eyes closed leads to personal devortion, worship songs and deep repentance are key to righteousness. The data is summerized in the chart below.

Chart 10: Whether Praying with eyes closed leads to personal dvortion, worship songs and deep repentance are key to righteousness

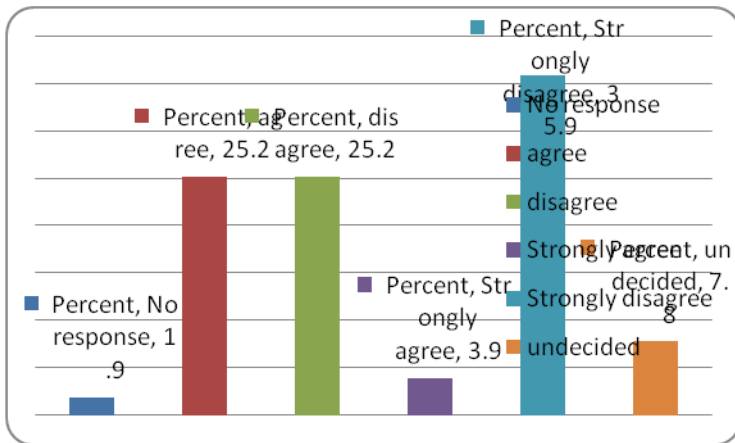


46 (44.7%) of the respondents agree that Praying with eyes closed leads to personal dvortion, worship songs and deep repentance are key to righteousness, 42 (40.8%) strongly agree, 8 (7.8%) were undecided, 4 (3.8%) did not respond, 3 (2.9%) were undecided and 2 (1.9%) disagree.

8.4. Death

Respondents were requested to indicate whether death is one way through which God is rapturing the church.. The responses are presented in the chart below.

Chart 11: whether Death is one way through which God is rapturing the church



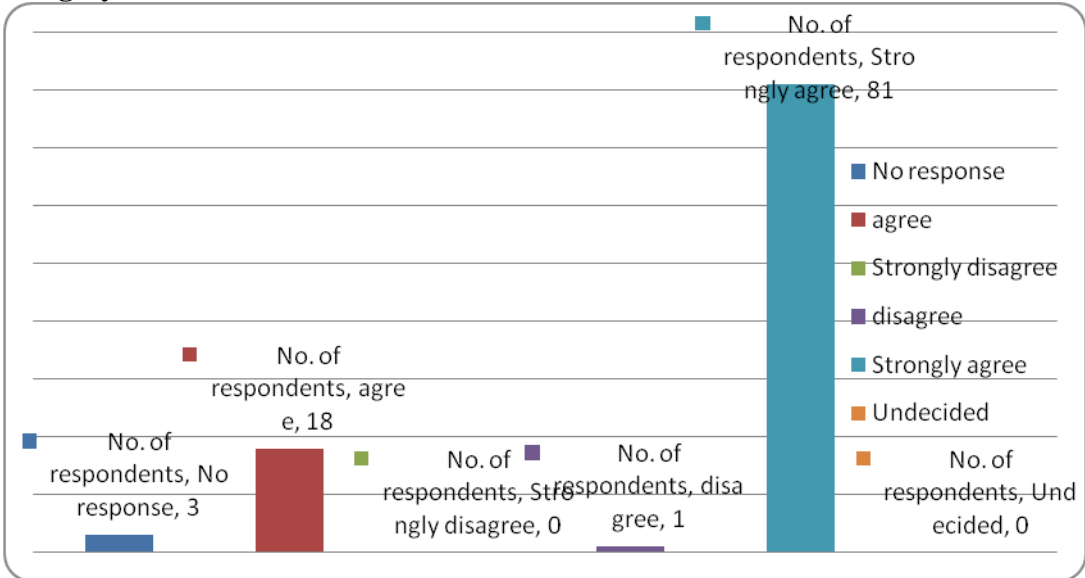
37 (35.9%) strongly disagree, 26 (25.2%) agree, 26 (25.2%) disagree, 8 (7.8%) were undecided 4 (3.9%) strongly agree and 2 (2%) did not respond.

In general, death is linked to rapture, whenever a person dies, he or she has gone to rest from the troubles of this world. He or she would have undergone rapture by Christ. The death of believers is celebrated. Pastors or overseers conduct burial ceremonies.

8.5. Marriage

Respondents were requested to indicate whether marriage stability and renewal by the priesthood is highly recommended.

Chart 12 : Whether marriage stability and renewal by the priesthood is highly recommended



81 (78.6%) respondents strongly agree, 18 (17.5%) agree, 1 (1%) disagree and 3 (2.9%) did not respond. The information is presented in the chart above.

In RHC those who got married before joining this church must go through the ritual since it is believed that those who got married before repentance, are living in sexual sin. After repentance everything must be renewed. The youth undertake a simple wedding that does not involve expenses like worldly people do. That is unrepentant ones.

9. Use of the Bible

Respondents were asked to indicate the Holy Bible is important in Repentance and Holiness Church . The results were tabulated below.

Table 8: Reason for the importance of the Holy Bible is in Repentance Church

	No. of respondents	Percent
No response	3	2.9
It inspires people to rapture	2	1.9
It is an authoritative word of God hence feared	9	8.7
It is mainly used in teaching, encouraging, rebuking, warning and admonition.	88	85.4
To punish errant members in RHC	1	1.0
Total	103	100.0

88 (85.4%) indicated that it is mainly used in teaching, encouraging, rebuking, warning and admonition. 9 respondents (8.7%) indicated that it is an authoritative word of God hence feared. 2 (1.9%) indicated that it inspires people to rapture. 1 (1%) person indicated that it is used to punish errant members in RHC. 3 (2.9%) people did not respond.

The Bible is used for preaching the word, interpreting the prophecies given by God to the prophet, teaching and explaining the importance of repentance as the vehicle to holiness and entry into the kingdom of God. The followers are very keen on every teaching given by either the prophet, the bishops or pastors. Every explanation ends with repentance and preparation for rapture. This is the greatest motivation to the large following in Repentance and Holiness Church.

10. Conclusion

Faith healing is the major attraction to the RHC. Most people are suffering for example the sick, the physically and spiritually challenged. Whenever they attend the prophet's meeting members attest to healings. The prophet is believed to be the best interpreter of the Bible. Making people understand the truth contrary to what other spiritual leaders do. At the same time, members of RHC insist that the prophet is concerned about the welfare of widows, orphans and the poor. For example he gives them money, food and clothing whenever they go for his crusades.

The findings of the study are useful to the phenomenon of Christianity in Africa and the rest of the world by presenting a theology that is relevant to the people in their own needs, situations and aspirations. The findings are relevant to help other Christian churches especially the mainstream churches to improve on their way of worship and services in order to satisfy their members spiritually and derive personal fulfillment. The data generated from this study is valuable in widening the existing knowledge on the factors for the mushrooming of African independent churches and their impact in Kenya and even beyond.

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