

# THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP LETTER

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## MOTIVATING AFRICANS TO GIVE

The Bible holds that the end will come only when the gospel shall have been preached to all nations. To achieve this Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Doing this means mobilizing resources and personnel who are to be sent within and across cultures. This requires financial outlay. If this is to be achieved Africans ought to heartily cooperate with God in promoting this glorious design. This can be done in many ways. One way that is crucial for the African Church is **GIVING**.

Giving is the ability to mobilize and provide the necessary resources including financial for the growth and advancement of the Church. Giving is essential for the growth and development of the Church because of the huge task of reaching the unreached and for the development and sustainability of the Church. Whereas giving is important to the growth and development of the Church in Africa and the world over, the socio-economic background upon which the missionaries found the people and their inability to teach them demotivated Africans to give. In Sierra Leone for example the missionaries sympathized with poverty of the people so much that they offered them dresses to go to Church. Members were not encouraged to give and where giving was practiced it was a common practice for missionaries to dish out money to parishioners for offering. During this period the Church depended on the missionaries to raise resources needed for Church development programs. Africans were mere beneficiaries of the gospel with little or no commitment to

giving. Today the relationship has changed to partnership. The destiny of the Church is now in our hands, hence the need to motivate Africans to give.

Africans we should feel motivated to give for the following reasons:

- **It is a mark of stewardship (Matthew 25: 14-30):** The New Testament teaching of stewardship implies that stewards are entrusted with resources by their masters and in turn such resources should be used for the master's purpose where he stands to enjoy the benefits and honour. As Africans we should know God's plan to ensure that the gospel is preached to all nations and that it is our responsible as stewards of his resources to use these resources to accomplish this task. It is only when we are able to do so that we will be called faithful stewards.
- **Giving is laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21):** The Bible calls on all Christians to lay up their treasure in heaven where safety for future benefit is assured. Giving for God's service is like laying treasures in heaven for where your treasure is there your heart is.

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- **The enormous needs of the Church:** The Church is organized to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of people within and outside the Church. The church is required to meet the needs of the poor ((Rm. 12:13), strangers (Lev. 25:35), the destitute (Isa. 58:7) and for forwarding missions (Phil. 4:14-15)
- **The blessing of giving:** The Bible teaches us about the blessings associated with giving, Ps. 41:1; Prov. 22:9; Act 20:35. Considering the fact that there is blessing in giving, as Africans we should make every effort not to rob ourselves of these tremendous blessings by not giving to the service of God. When we give as others have done we stand to enjoy the blessings of giving. In fact the lack of giving is a curse and a proof that we don't love and have faith in God (1 Jn. 3:17; Jm. 2:14-16).
- **The nature of our relationship with Global Partners:** Before now the Church in Africa greatly depended on foreign donors for mission work and the advancement of the Church. Today the situation has changed. We have become autonomous which means self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. This new status means we

now have the responsibility to raise our resources for the sustainability of the Church.

- **Giving means determining our destiny:** When we raise our resources locally we can determine the direction of these resources. By our own resources we are able to meet our goals and objectives rather than depending on foreign and designated funds. In Sierra Leone for example when the missionaries raised monies to build Churches such buildings were either small or build with poor materials. Today we have better buildings than before because the people now raise their funds and determine the size of the church and nature of materials to be built.

Africans can give in diverse ways such as tithing, offerings, gifts etc.

I wish to congratulate the African church for what we have been able to do so far in the continent. The fact also remain that there is room for more improvement. As we dream of becoming an African General Conference, let us demonstrate this by giving to motivate and mobilize resources amongst ourselves. I trust God's blessings upon His work in this wonderful and beautiful continent.



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## THE BENEFITS OF MINISTRIES THAT ARE SELF SUPPORTING

**INTRODUCTION:** There are tremendous benefits to any organization that is able to generate enough resources to run its program. The freedom to prosecute the goals and objectives of a ministry without the worry about finances must liberating and I think something that every ministry, church or organization should work towards achieving.

In the Wesleyan church it is assumed that an established church is one that is able to pay salary of the pastor and meet all current expenses among other requirements. In other words, all churches are expected to be self-supporting at least in running their day to day operations. A church that is incapable of raising enough capital to finance its operations is like a bird with a broken wing - it cannot fly. A church/ministry in that situation is destined to be ineffective because it cannot reasonably carry out its mandate.

For anyone to enjoy the benefits of being able to support themselves, they must first work their way to that position. I sincerely believe that every ministry/church should be helped and guided to be able to reach that goal of self-sufficiency.

**GETTING THERE:** The core business of Christian ministry is to share the Good News (Gospel) of our Lord Jesus Christ with the whole world. To be able to fulfill this task requires finances. God made provision for his church when He asked that his people pay tithes and offerings to his house. (Malachi 3: 10) This command was to ensure that there was "food", money or enough resources in the church to carry out its mandate. Christians are encouraged to give generously to the work of God. If every Christian were to give what is required of them, I dare say that our churches will have enough to work with. The challenge then is for all

Christian leaders to make it a priority to teach their members their obligation to give generously to the work of God.

Aside from the area of tithing, the church in Africa needs to plant churches where the people are. We are told that for the first time in the history of the world, more people now live in urban centres than in the rural area. The Wesleyan church has recognized this and is encouraging our churches to go into the city. In most of Africa, particularly in Ghana, people that work in the formal sector and make monthly incomes and all kinds of business people live in our urban areas. Such people when properly cultivated could supply the finances that are needed to manage our ministries/churches. Folks in our small towns and villages are to contribute their quota to the growth of the church by tithing on whatever they have. We reckon that most of them do not have cash often and so should be encouraged to offer their foodstuff or produce as their tithes and offerings. Nothing says that we cannot go back to the former days of how it all started. Even now in some churches in Ghana, members bring foodstuff, vegetables and poultry as offerings and tithes to the church.

We may also need to form some strategic partnerships to help get our ministries/churches to the point where they can be self-supporting. I do not mean by this that the African church must straightaway look to North America or to Europe for such partners. I am

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suggesting that some of our urban churches that are well endowed could adopt some rural churches and nurture them. There are churches in Ghana here (other denominations) that are already practicing this principle successfully. The advantage in this is that both the sponsoring church and the sponsored benefit from this arrangement. The urban sponsoring church gets the blessing of giving to advance the work of God and fulfill its mission obligation while the receiving church is also blessed getting the financial or material resource it requires to function effectively. It is a win-win situation for both parties.

Of course, we are not ruling out foreign partnerships as long as there is an exit clause. The African church should avoid becoming dependent on donor support. It seems easy just receiving from somebody else's toil without lifting a finger to help oneself but this could pose serious problems in the long term for the receiving church. One of the things that can help the church in Africa is a strategy to help us invest in many of the booming sectors of our economies so that we can continuously make money to help our churches. The fact that churches in Africa are not self-supporting after several decades of existence is no longer tenable. We ought to find a way, a clearly defined way of bringing our churches to the point where they can support themselves.

The church in Africa needs more partners with the expertise to help us go into the health sector, agriculture and aquaculture or fish farming and cottage industries among others. I appreciate the fact that the thought of the church in secular business may scare some of our people, but in the face of dwindling resources from the traditional sources, the church needs to be innovative. Again we are not advocating that pastors leave their traditional role of shepherding the flock of God to go into the business world, no, but there are

enough qualified men and women in our churches who we can enlist to work on behalf of the church. If the African church is to be the strong, vibrant church that we all desire it to be, then we must all work towards resourcing her to take up that challenge.

**BENEFITS OF BEING SELF-SUPPORTING:** One of most obvious benefits of being self-supporting is that the ministry/church will be in a position to carry out the important task of evangelism and missions. It is sad to note that some churches do not have anything in their budget for the propagation of the gospel which is supposed to be the reason for the church's existence. With adequate finances there will be no excuse for not doing it.

A church will be better placed to cater to the needs of its members who require special assistance – to assist the widows and orphans, the unemployed and those who are down and out. I strongly believe that if the resources of our ministries/churches were applied judiciously and fairly, there would not be anyone who lacks for sustenance within the church. Mahatma Ghandi is reputed to have said that “there are enough resources for every man's need not for every man's greed”. I am reminded of the story in Acts chapter 6 where some people complained that they were being overlooked when it came down to the daily distribution of food. Having adequate resources should inspire the church to be generous to our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

A ministry/church will be in a position to do good to all people as they have opportunity by participating in the life of its community. Christians have a responsibility to demonstrate the love of God for all people by being kind, helpful and generous to society at large. By giving even “a cup of cold water” in the name of Jesus one stands to gain a thank you from the Lord himself. A church that is involved in its

community gains the acceptance and trust of its neighbours. Such a church is blessed by being seen as a friend of the community.

One of the major benefits of being self-supporting is that the church can plan and execute its own programs without waiting on someone to supply the funding first. The church in Ghana has long standing plans for instance, to plant one church a year in each of our ten regional capitals. The church also estimated at that time that it will cost about \$10,000 to plant one of those churches. For three years now we have not been able to plant even one church. If you are still wondering why, the answer is simple, we are waiting for sponsors. Because we do not have the resources, we cannot even set our own growth agenda. Being self-supporting then will give the church the blessing of being in control and in charge of its own program.

A self-supporting church will have the courage to deal with its peers and partners as equals and not feel inferior or ashamed. The African church for the most part has been at the receiving end and that does not inspire confidence. The feeling of inadequacy is bound to make one timid and doubt their ability to make meaningful contributions when the occasion demands it. Standing on equal footing with your peers will undoubtedly give a boost to any ministry and enhance their determination to serve well.

**CONCLUSION:** It is indeed a blessing and a benefit for any ministry to be self-supporting.



As much as we will encourage all ministries and churches to aspire to attain that goal, we do recognize their need to be helped along the way. Due to the crippling effects of poverty in Africa, most of our churches require someone to come alongside them to give them a hand up. The African church ought to do whatever is in their power to raise capital for the work of ministry. There is the need to train and encourage our church members to tithe, to even give over and above their tithes. Every member of the church whether in the rural or urban centres must give their fair share to the building of the kingdom of God. The church should prioritize the planting of urban churches because most of the population of the world today now lives in cities. Also because many of our members in the urban centres work in the formal sector, they are able to contribute significantly to the support of these churches.

For any Christian organization to succeed, it must be recognized that it must rely solely and fully on God for direction and for power. We have to do whatever is within our means to do, but in the end we have to present it all to God in prayer and ask for his blessings and his will to be done. In this instance we reckon that God wants our ministries and churches to succeed and would therefore bless our efforts at making legitimate and ethical wealth for that purpose.

Africa needs strong, vibrant and self-supporting churches.

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## Understanding Dependency

One of the biggest dangers for the church in Africa is the danger of becoming financially dependent on partners from outside. Dependency is defined as “when a local church requires funding or leadership from outside of its own members in order carry out the core biblical responsibilities of a local church under normal conditions.” (Sout)

### Causes of Dependency:

Dependency is a trap into which the African church can find itself being lured without realizing it. Why do some churches develop to the place where they cannot function without financial assistance from outside? The reasons are many and include the following:

1. When churches were started their financial needs were met by someone from outside and the local people were never taught or expected to begin meeting their own needs. It is similar to a small child whose needs are cared for by his/her parents, but that child is never taught or expected to care for him/herself.
2. Often the church or mission has established systems or programs that are beyond the ability of the local people to sustain with their own resources. In some places in Africa an unhealthy competition exists between churches over which church can provide the biggest and best facilities and programs, driving many to seek overseas donors since they are unable to compete on the basis of their own resources.
3. Because overseas donors are seen to be wealthier it seems easier to ask for help from overseas than to raise support from local people who seem to be less financially able. However, very often those who are likely to give the most generously are those who seem to be the poorest (II Co. 8:2), and

those who are closest to the need are those whose hearts are most likely to be touched by it.

4. Sometimes there is a fear that the church will not be able to grow if it relies solely on its own resources since those resources barely are adequate to enable the church to maintain the *status quo*. The truth is that although the church might grow more quickly when we rely on overseas resources, it will grow more solidly when we sacrifice and look to God to supply the needed resources through us.
5. Some leaders (hopefully no Wesleyans!) use the access to outside funding in order to gain and/or keep the loyalty of his/her followers. This is a common practice in politics, but should have no place in the work of the church!

### Consequences of Dependency:

Regardless of the cause behind dependency, it can have a very serious negative impact on the church and its ministries. Some of those consequences include:

1. One of the most serious consequences of dependency is that Africans do not assume a feeling of ownership and responsibility for the church and its institutions. For example, many churches fail to care for routine maintenance on the church building that was built and given to them by overseas donors – they simply wait for an American work team to come some day to paint the walls and replace the broken glass!
2. Church members in dependent churches often do not develop the capacity and heart to give to support the work of God’s kingdom. In many African churches members regularly give offerings consisting

of small coins with little or no value even though they regularly pay much greater sums for their own personal needs. They've been taught to give "small".

3. Similarly, dependence on outside funding may weaken the willingness of local to volunteer and serve. The availability of external funding leads people to expect payment for any ministry they may be asked to do.
4. Dependency can create a sense a low self-esteem among those who are dependent. How can we feel like equal partners in the international church if we are dependent on the rest of the church in order for us to carry on with our ministries?
5. Dependency can create jealousy and conflict within the church as leaders, ministries, and churches compete for the limited resources available from the overseas donors. Rather than the biblical model of helping one another in ministry we find the exact opposite taking place.
6. An African church that relies on outside funding for doing its work will be viewed in society as an extension of a foreign church/faith rather than being truly African.
7. Leaders of dependent churches face the temptation of corruption and are frequently suspected of being involved in corrupt practices whether or not it is true. While some succumb to the temptation to benefit from the funds which flow through their hands, others maintain their integrity but are assumed nonetheless to have enriched themselves because of their connection with the foreign donor(s).
8. Foreign funding may cause leaders to become less accountable to local accountability structures. Since the money comes from outside, leaders may fall into the trap of trying to keep the donor happy

while failing to account locally for the funds since they didn't come from within.

9. New outreach and expansion may be slowed and hindered. Dependent church will often fail to take advantage of ministry opportunities that are before them unless their partner(s) provides the finances needed to pursue the opportunity.

#### Hints for Avoiding Dependency:

One of the marks of a healthy mature church is that it is able to financially sustain its ministries by the donations of its members as well as supports ministry and outreach beyond itself. How can African churches avoid the trap of dependency or break free from it if they've been caught?

1. Recognize that the battle for financial sustainability is a spiritual battle in its essence. Satan loves to keep a church in a state of financial dependency because its effectiveness is greatly hindered. Spiritual renewal in our churches may be what is needed for our people to become the kind of cheerful givers that God loves and blesses.
2. Determine to carry out the regular "core biblical functions" of the church relying solely upon God to provide the resources from within the church. Determine to use outside funding only to enable secondary ministries and projects that are not central to the church's functioning.
3. Shape ministries, structures, and programs so that they are locally sustainable. Find ways to phase out of ministries, structures, and programs that cannot be sustained apart from the significant inflow of support from foreign sources.
4. Whenever outside donors contribute to a project/ministry, make sure that a significant portion of the finances are from local sources. Seriously question any

“vision” that depends primarily upon outside financing for its fulfillment.

5. Have the courage to say “no” to potential donors who wish to support a vision for the church that is their vision, rather than a vision that God gave to the church. It is better to offend a potential donor than to commit to a project that has no ownership within the local church and its leadership.
6. Be very careful to be open and clear on reporting to local leadership boards and committees on funds received. They need to know exactly what was given by whom for what purpose and exactly how those funds were utilized. There should be no questions about whether anything is hidden or whether anyone has benefited unduly from funds donated.
7. Help the church to develop a vision not only for carrying the financial load for their own ministry but also for giving to advance the work of the kingdom beyond themselves. This is a switch from having a mentality of being recipients to becoming givers. Healthy churches are excited about the opportunity to be used by God to meet the needs of others.

These are days of opportunity for the African church unlike we have ever seen before. However, a dependent church will be unable to seize those opportunities and move ahead with the message of the gospel to the extent it could if it was financially sustainable. May God help us to trust in Him to provide through us all that is needed to accomplish the mission He has given us.

Resources:

Lederleitner, Mary T. (2010) *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

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Schwartz, Glenn. (2007) *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*. Lancaster, PA: World Mission Associates.

Sout, Ken. (2008) *Fostering Sustainability & Minimizing Dependency in Mission Finances*. Thesis. Reformed Theological Seminary.



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