

CHURCH GROWTH IN SIERRA LEONE: A CASE STUDY

The history of the Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone has major indications of some phenomenal growth at certain periods in the life of the Church through certain programmes. For example, the *New Life for All* was referred to as a highly successful evangelistic programme, which came to Sierra Leone in 1967 from Nigeria. The Missionary in Charge, Rev. Marion P. Birch, recruited laymen and trained them. Prayer cells were developed and house-to-house visitation organized. A vital phase of the plan called for personal witnessing by every Christian, sharing the gospel with non-Christians, and strengthening the faith of new converts. "It is categorically stated that where ever New Life for All Principles have been applied, Church growth has been a result." The point to highlight in the citation above is the recruitment and training of laymen and sending them one- on- one to witness and to evangelize. The results proved remarkable. The Churches grew numerically from 62 local Wesleyan congregations to 120 in just a period of four months¹. This phenomenal growth in number of Churches created the need for the training of more pastors to operate these new congregations.

The growth mentioned above can be attributed to the strategy, which involved the laity to complement the clergy. This time it was not the clergy or the professionals doing it all alone. They extended hands to the laity, trained them,

sent them, and with some amount of supervision and encouragement the growth came.

Another programme of similar nature called The *Metro-Move seminar*, was organized in 1978 in Freetown. This was an offshoot of worldwide Wesleyan movement to plant Churches and evangelize through planned strategy in urban areas². This programme, like the previous one, recruited a wide range of laypersons, including men, women and the youth. These were trained to evangelize on a one- to-one basis, to do witnessing in homes, and do follow-up visits on new converts for a period of three months. The result of this programme marked the beginning of the phase of the Wesleyan Church development in Freetown, the Capital city of Sierra Leone, where no Wesleyan local congregation ever existed. By the end of the three months of Metro Move Seminar activities in Freetown, the Kissy Mess- Mess Wesleyan Church was strengthened and organized; and another

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¹ *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church*, paragraph, 20

² *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church*, paragraph, 26.

congregation was established in Kenema, one of the provincial headquarter towns of Sierra Leone. Today the Kissy Mess-Mess Local Church has given birth to thirteen other Wesleyan Church congregations in Freetown and its environs.

These two examples of lay and clergy complementarity in evangelistic programmes quoted from the history of the Wesleyan Church can be cited as an indication that the phenomenon might work in favour of Church growth even today in the Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone. Should the Church now give it a trial?

The history also shows some major growth of the Wesleyan Church especially from the period 1985 to 1989. Firstly, the period 1983 to 1985 was a transition time from one district Church administration to multi-district or national Church administration. There was a division of the then one district Church into three districts.³ Further growth in the Church led to the addition of another district in 1986 (The Koinadugu District), making four districts. In 1987, the Southern District was further divided into two making the number of districts to five. In 1989 the Northern District was also divided into two making a total of six administrative districts in all. It is worth noting that, the

We will not – we cannot- impact the world for Christ the way we want to, unless all God’s people are equipped and trained for the exciting ministry to which God has called them.

³ *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church*, paragraph, 28.

The term “district” referred to here means an administrative division of the Church according to geographical areas in the like of a diocese in the Methodist, and Anglican tradition or a presbytery in the Presbyterian order.

divisions of the district was because of numerical growth in the number of local congregations in the districts affected. The names of the districts were in the same year 1989 changed to correspond with the major town in each district: Freetown District, Gbendembu District, Makeni District, Kamakwie District, Madina District and Kabala District. From these developments, it can be deduced that there was some growth in the numerical dimension, which led to a corresponding growth in the administrative dimension too.

It is also worth noting that two of the Districts, Kabala and Freetown were pioneer and provisional districts respectively at the time. Today, these two Church Districts have grown into full fledged Districts. That means they are able to administer themselves, propagate by themselves and are self-motivating. These are marks of some kind of growth experienced by the Church during the period.

Apart from the case cited in the immediate paragraph above, it is regretful to note that from 1989 to date, the number of Church districts have remained the same.

The questions one may ask are: was this phenomenal growth from one district to six-district Church a real quantitative (numerical) growth? Was it just an administrative strategy to divide a nationwide Church, which was one district into some administrative units called districts for easy administration? The slogan of the then leader (National Superintendent) the Rev. Dr. Y.M. Kroma under whose leadership this so-called growth took place was “We divide to multiply”.

James L. Garlow succinctly inscribed in the pages of his book – *Partners in Ministry: Laity and Pastors Working Together*, his conviction that “It is an absolute necessity, that we will not – we cannot- impact the world for Christ the way we want to, unless all God’s people are equipped and trained for the exciting ministry to which God has called them.”⁴ It is believed that the Laity has a tremendously important role to play in the building of God’s kingdom. “They are not second-class citizens; rather they are called by God Almighty to ambassadorial status”.⁵ The problem in the Wesleyan Church

of Sierra Leone is that the laypersons believe that the Pastor is the Minister, the professionally trained officer, who is hired and solely responsible for all it takes for the Church to grow. The lay people on the other hand consider themselves as recipients. This is a serious problem militating against the desired growth of the church. This need to empower the laity can serve as means to share the task of Christian ministry which will inevitably promote Church growth in all its facets.

The article above is adapted from “Church Growth: A Synergy of Clergy and Laity Complementarity - A Case Study Of The Wesleyan Church Of Sierra Leone,” a thesis submitted for the MTh degree at Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana.

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<sup>4</sup> James L. Garlow, *Partners In Ministry: Laity and Pastors Working Together* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>5</sup> James L. Garlow. P.22.

# Mobilizing African Wesleyans for Missions

## Introduction

Matthew 24:14 “And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Our Lord Jesus wants everyone to have an opportunity of hearing the gospel of the kingdom as a witness before He returns. As Wesleyans, we have this task of spreading the gospel all over the world. Global Partners has done well in Christianizing part of the African continent. As a matter of fact, Global Partners has over stretched her budget and manpower to make African converts. Meanwhile, African Wesleyans have done very little to spread the gospel to neighboring countries and beyond. It is high time that African Wesleyans Christianize the continent.

I hereby suggest the following strategies for Mobilizing Wesleyans for Missions:

First, churches need to fervently pray for the Lord of the harvest to send laborers for missions. Success on the mission field hugely depends on **prayer**. Missions is too huge for any person to accomplish success outside of prayer. It would be wise for Wesleyan churches in Africa that have interest in sending missionaries to have praying teams that would pray daily for missions. Let only those called to missions be involved with missions. One operates more in the power of the Holy Spirit when he serves in his area of calling. As such, God is glorified and the servant of God is fulfilled.

While prayer is a key factor, those who are called must be trained. One cannot overemphasize the need for training. Basic requirements for the mission field include competence and commitment. No matter how spiritual one may

be, he needs **training**. It is said that a sharp cutlass does a better work than a dull one. I believe one reason why Paul made a tremendous impact was because of his education. It is said that “You attract who you are”. It is very beneficial to have trained missionaries as church planters. Such people would attract other educated and influential people on the mission field who would be able to continue the work after the departure or demise of the missionary. Attracting the right people and assigning them to their various areas of calling is very important to church growth and development. The Wesleyan Church of Africa must hear this; “The days of the ignorant pulpit ministering to the educated pew are over.”

**Commitment** is another key factor in addition to prayer. No one succeeds in any endeavor without commitment. Serving as a missionary in a foreign land is very challenging. If one is not called and is not committed, he would fail miserably despite his calling and training.

Second, the church sending a missionary must have clearly defined **vision**. Such statements should include a purpose statement clearly defining what the church would like to accomplish. Vision is a large factor to progress on the mission field. However, a mission agency may have all the funds yet accomplish so little without vision. Those who go to the mission field because of money get easily discouraged and

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frustrated because money is inadequate when it comes to motivation. Vision motivates more than anything else. Sending a missionary without a clearly defined vision is tiring.

Third, willingness to own the vision by **paying the price** plays a vital role. Failures in the past have been due to our Africans willingness to pay the price. Many want to plant churches yet heavily rely on Global Partners to fund the work without contributing a dime. It is said that the dog has nothing to give the owner but at least it is able to shake its tail to welcome the owner. One cannot own a vision for which he is unwilling to pay the price. May I seek your indulgence to say here that Liberia's success in its mission in Nigeria has been due to prayers and ownership of the work. The Wesleyan Church of Liberia took a 'Special offering' the very day we were commissioned as missionaries to Nigeria. Besides, individual Liberians hugely contributed towards planting the first church in Lagos Nigeria which cost about five thousand (\$5,000) United State dollars.

It was said sacrificial giving backed by prayers that first of all moved the hearts of our Sierra Leonean brothers who were studying at West Africa Theological Seminary to join us. When brethren at Faith Wesleyan in Atkinson, Nebraska heard about the efforts of the Liberian church to plant a church in Africa's most

populous nation despite our civil war, they came to our aid. We cannot close without mentioning the contributions of both human and financial resources of the Wesleyan church of Sierra Leone towards the work in Nigeria. Some made tremendous sacrifices.

### **Conclusion**

Today, we have a church in Lagos, Nigeria that is able to accommodate about 600 people. Our partners have also assisted us in leasing a building for our primary school which now has about one hundred, forty two students. Our junior and senior secondary school facility which would accommodate about four hundred students is nearing completion. But, it all started when the Wesleyan Church of Liberia pioneered a church plant in Nigeria and paid the price. It was then that others came to assist. It is said that if you want others to help you, put your load on your head, it should be on your knee.

Planting churches and sending missionaries would fail without a strategy for self-sustainability. New works need a sustainable strategy. Our strategy in Nigeria is to construct schools that would empower members through employment. Meanwhile, said schools would serve as evangelistic and resuscitating arms of our church.



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THE MODEL FOR AFRICAN LEADERS: CHIEF OR SERVANT?

In the beginning God created a beautiful garden called Eden. In it He created both plant and animals. Man was later created in the image of God with an ultimate purpose to 'tend and keep the land' (Genesis 2:15). Realizing that man was alone in providing management for the garden he formed a woman (Eve) out of the ribs of Adam. Both Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit which they were forbidden to eat. Consequently God punished both of them. In pronouncing punishment for the woman God told Eve that Adam will rule over her. This indicated that God has always had concern for the upkeep of His created world both human and material resources hence raised people to tend and keep these resources. In the patriarchal blessing to Abraham which was later extended to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph the aspect of leadership was strongly factored. In biblical history God raised and sustained leaders like Joseph, Moses, and Joshua. In the theocratic dispensation God provided direct leadership for His people until he was rejected (1 Samuel 8:7-8). Israel desiring to be like other nations asked to break the theocracy so that they can have a king who will lead them in war. God made the provision for human leadership until the greatest of all leaders was born JESUS CHRIST. Many leaders have come and gone displaying different leadership models which mostly reflect the culture and the personality of the leader. This article examines two leadership models, the 'Chief' a form of leadership practiced in Africa and the 'Servant' model otherwise known as the 'Christ-like leadership model

The Chief leadership model: before the advent of colonialism, Africa was divided into Kingdoms. Kingdoms were defined mainly by the military might of a warrior. The warrior who wields such power and control becomes the king. With the coming of colonialism kingdoms were amalgamated to form modern states. The

powers of kings were reduced to small portions of territories known as Chiefdoms. The Chiefdoms were subdivided into Sections and villages. The title 'king' was replaced by 'chief'.

The Chief leadership model varies from one culture to another but bears some common features,

- *Leadership is attained by hereditary; children and great grandchildren of warriors who have a history in establishing the Chiefdom are qualified to become leaders regardless of their ability and calling.*
- *The subjects provide livelihood support for chiefs and their families through personal contribution in cash or in kind and compulsory labor.*
- *Chiefs take decisions with little or no consultation. They are approached only through an exchange of gift.*
- *Levy heavy fine on defaulters.*

The general picture of the chief model in leadership is that leaders are to be served instead of serving the people. Their service to the people was seen only on the role of the great warriors who defended the people and were able to establish the kingdom.

The Servant leadership model: Jesus demonstrated the servanthood type of leadership in Jn. 13:1-15; during the Passover feast He rose from his seat and washed his disciples' feet. Washing of feet was practiced in the Jewish culture but it was expected that the servant should wash the feet of his master. In fact this was the reason why Peter prevented Jesus from washing his feet (John 13:6). Peter accepted being washed only after Jesus told him that he has no part with Him if he denies Jesus

to wash his feet. (John 13:8). By washing the feet of his disciples Jesus was setting them an example of a type of servanthood leadership which bears the following characteristics:

- *Willing to serve others rather than being served*
- *The leader's life is characterized by humility and purity.*
- *He loves his people, he is self-sacrificing to a point that he is willing to die for them.*
- *He depends on God for everything, in fact God is the source of power*
- *The leader rejoices in times of difficulties or persecution.*

The Servant leadership model is people centered. Its ultimate aim is to seek the wellbeing of the subjects. This is the model for African leaders. We need leaders who by their humble spirit can see themselves as servants called to tend and keep both the human and

material resources entrusted to them. They see themselves as being called by God to offer services to their people. In doing this they demonstrate a self-sacrificing spirit where they are even willing to die to meet the needs of their people. We need courageous leaders who will endure persecution to a point where they 'turn the other cheek when slapped on one' or like Jesus can turn round and look at their persecutors and say, 'Lord forgive them for they know not what they are doing.' We need leaders in Africa who are devoted to what they want to achieve even when prevented by some circumstances. Jesus stayed focus on washing the disciples' feet even when Peter prevented him from doing so.

Adopting this kind of leadership model will build powerful institutions. With this model Jesus was able to raise apostles who were able to carry out the remaining task of evangelism. If African leaders are to build and sustain powerful institutions we must turn away from 'Chief' model of leadership and embrace the Servant model.



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*The African Leadership Letter* is a joint publication of the African Wesleyan Fellowship and the Africa Area Office of Global Partners. Send address changes or requests to be added to or removed from the mailing list to: [rbagley112@gmail.com](mailto:rbagley112@gmail.com). This publication is also available on the Africa Area website: [www.gpafrika.org](http://www.gpafrika.org)

