

THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP LETTER

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCREDITATION FOR AFRICAN BIBLE COLLEGES

The concept of accreditation for African Bible Colleges is very important for the existence of such institutions. Every Bible College has its mission and purpose for operating whether in a developed or developing nation. These colleges in most cases are established to train men and women often times younger folks for the ministry of Jesus Christ.

In their efforts to fulfill this task, they developed programs that prepare these students academically, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and many other ways.

Academically, these courses prepare the students to develop intellectually being able to discuss and deal with several biblical doctrines and practices.

Spiritually, they take students through several disciplines of worship, prayer, fasting, evangelism and reading of scriptures that mold them into meeting up with the spiritual realities of ministry. These exercises give them hands on experiences as to what ministry is all about.

As they participate in these exercises they mature spiritually being prepared to rightly divide the word of God.

Emotionally and psychologically, Bible College training prepares the mindset of students to deal with life's critical issues. In life there comes good and bad times. Certain conditions will be so pleasant that one would like for them to continue perpetually, and equally so, there

comes other times and conditions that no one would like to endure.

With these two sides to life's situations, it is only but a good thing that the students are prepared to handle whatever life may present them. Bible College training provides such opportunities for its students.

These students upon the completion of their programs of studies go out in the world to fill various ministries roles as the Holy Spirit will appoint them. They get out in the fields ministering to diverse peoples with different problems and needs.

With their training coupled with the grace of God upon their lives, in most cases they perform well. God receives the glory and their colleges are often praised for having trained them with such skills that are making them to accomplish so much.

These students are held accountable to many stakeholders namely: churches, ministries and institutions they work for, the governments of their countries, their Alma maters, their colleagues from other colleges and the general societies within which they find themselves.

The churches, ministries and institutions want the best from these graduates from African Bible Colleges. They believed with the training acquired from the colleges, the graduates can serve them adequately as they deal with life's many challenges.

The governments on the other hand want to ensure that graduates from these colleges that are serving in various capacities are qualified to serve in these offices.

Their Alma maters want to make sure that they don't graduate until the requirements are met to send them out. They believe these graduates as ambassadors will either represent them in manners that are befitting their graduates or if not properly prepared may tarnish their hard earned reputation as academic institutions.

Their colleagues from other higher institutions of learning are watching to see what their fellows are doing as graduates from these schools that are equally competing with them in the man power development of those nations.

The general public or society within which these African Bible Colleges' graduates reside serves as watch dogs for their performances and outputs. These societies know exactly how graduates are to perform especially if they are from Bible Colleges.

With all of these stakeholders' anticipation it is only expedient that the African Bible Colleges in this 21st Century be accredited so as to give all parties the benefit of the doubt as to whether the colleges are adequately preparing its graduates for better service to the Christian Community.

When Jesus walked the face of planet earth, he did prioritize training. It is mandatory that the church of today should not neglect this aspect of ministry. A minister or servant of God who is trained will know exactly what to do in ministry as the Holy Spirit enlightens that person.

Accreditation for African Bible Colleges should not be overlooked or downplayed. It gives the colleges the prestige needed to do higher

education on the one hand and the students the value they deserved upon completing their studies.

A college that isn't accredited no matter how trained its faculty may be and how sophisticated its facilities may be will always be looked down upon by its various stakeholders. It is a good thing to have qualified lecturers and administrators as well as modern facilities and equipment. But without that institution being accredited, it is like having a car without engine.

Therefore, since accreditation plays a major role in the life of any college especially African Bible Colleges, it requires joint efforts on the part of all stakeholders and well-wishers to ensure that these colleges are accredited by the requisite bodies so as to give them their validity.

The denominations or individuals that own these colleges should work with the various boards and administrations of these schools to make sure accreditation is achieved. The administrations should not be left alone to struggle with the challenges of accreditation. Equally so it is not the board alone that should bear the yoke of accreditation. It should be a joint effort by these two major leaders of the college. The denomination should provide moral and financial support in making sure that African Bible Colleges are accredited.

The governments in most cases will make the process difficult for African Bible Colleges to be accredited. But this should not be strange to us as Christians. As we may be aware, our warfare is not against flesh and blood but against rulers, powers and wickedness in high places. They have an agenda that we should not be ignorant about. They want to make sure that the church becomes powerless and remained in ignorance so that the gates of hell will prevail against the church. But what they fail to realize is that Jesus

promised us that it is not possible for the gates of hell to prevail against the church.

As a denomination, accept kindly my fervent plea that we do all within our powers as our good God provides the resources to ensure that all of our Bible Colleges are accredited so as to give them the right to do what they are doing to the best of their ability preparing men and women for the gospel ministry. Our colleges are blessed. They are putting out graduates that are making headways in the various sectors they find themselves be it the classroom or in the church. Some have even gone outside the Christian arena to work in governmental agencies and entities.

But with all of these achievements many at times they are looked down upon because their Alma maters are not accredited. They are like a saying in Liberian proverbs that says “The dump truck that builds the Executive Mansion should not enter the premises of the mansion”.

It is about time that accreditation for African Bible Colleges be given serious attention by our denomination. Failure on our part to achieve this task as a church will continue to downplay the hard work our institutions are doing by providing quality higher education for men and women who have the responsibility to carry out the Great Commission in this 21st century.



**Rev. Seedee Williams,
Academic Dean,
Wesleyan College of Liberia (WESCOL)**

Email: seedeewilliams@yahoo.com

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The task is challenging but we can take solace in the words of Paul in Philippians 4:13 when he says “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. The battle is the Lord’s. All we should do is trust him and apply all he gives us to achieve this task.

Sometimes we may be threatened by governments’ policies and regulations. But may I remind us that with God all things are possible. Knowing the importance of accreditation for African Bible Colleges, we should not relent until the battle is won. So that our institutions will proudly conduct their activities without fear of being demoralized by the actions of governments and other major stakeholders.

*Knowing the importance of accreditation for African Bible Colleges, we should not relent until the battle is won.*

## THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ACCREDITATION THROUGH ACTEA

Since its formation in 1976, the ACTEA (*Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa*) has served to promote excellence in the area of evangelical theological education. Their mission “to promote quality evangelical theological education in Africa by providing supporting services, facilitating academic recognition, and fostering continental and inter-continental cooperation”<sup>1</sup> is largely implemented by providing a recognized accrediting service for evangelical theological schools. In this article I hope to familiarize the reader with the process of accreditation and to then discuss advantages and disadvantages associated with accreditation through ACTEA.

ACTEA accreditation is a process of formal certification ensuring a school has met a set of standards geared toward international academic recognition at various levels of education. (secondary, post-secondary, graduate and post-graduate) It is important to understand that its accreditation is for programs only and not institutions as a whole. It is also important to note that ACTEA only provides accreditation for theological education programs. It does not assess and accredit programs in areas such as psychology, business or education unless they are included as part of traditional theological curriculum.

### THE PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION WITH ACTEA?

The *ACTEA Standards & Guides to Self-Evaluation Booklet*, available on their website, lists four stages a school must undergo to achieve accreditation.

**Correspondent Status:** Allows an institution to register for a three-year renewable membership as a “Correspondent Member”,

opening avenues of communication for the institution to identify with ACTEA and access any of its non-accredited services. A fee of \$120 is required at this stage.

**Affiliate Status:** Marks the first level of the accrediting process giving a school full but provisional academic recognition and lasting a maximum of four years. A school must make a formal declaration of its intention to pursue full accreditation and meet core academic standards relating to library resources, student admissions, teaching staff qualifications and length of study program/s. Costs involve travel for an ACTEA representative visit and an application fee of \$375 for secondary level and \$750 for post-secondary level institutions. Thereafter an annual fee of \$300 plus \$3.60 per student (secondary) and \$500 plus \$7.20 per student (post-secondary) is paid throughout the candidacy process and for accreditation.

**Candidacy Status:** Following the achievement of affiliate status, a school can apply for candidacy during which it engages in a “self-evaluation” process based on ACTEA standards and ending with a report. After the report an ACTEA visitation team completes an onsite assessment to determine whether to award full accreditation for the institutional programs in question. The institution can remain in the candidacy stage for a maximum of four years.

**Accredited Status:** Full accreditation is granted for ten years. An annual report is submitted showing how the school is maintaining the accreditation standards. Beginning in the eighth year another process of “self-evaluation” takes place with an onsite assessment in order to renew its accreditation status.

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<sup>1</sup> ACTEA home page. <http://www.acteaweb.org/> (accessed January 5, 2017).

## WHAT ADVANTAGES ARE THERE TO ACCREDITATION THROUGH ACTEA?

1. **Market place credibility:** As levels of education continue to rise in Africa the demands for quality and credibility also rise. Students themselves want to be sure of the value of their education and as they enter the workplace those they are serving will be looking for assurances of that quality.
2. **Encourage investment and support:** A school that has worked for and attained full accreditation could find that it encourages a deeper level of support from its stakeholders whether it is the sponsoring church, prospective students, or external donors. For the same reason that businesses have their books audited externally, an external accreditation process fosters higher levels of credibility and trust with all stakeholders. Trust that comes with credibility has a way of encouraging investment.
3. **Evaluation and transfer of educational credits:** Accreditation allows other institutions a way to easily evaluate and transfer education credits between schools. It does not guarantee a school will accept educational credits but greatly aids in the evaluation process, especially as ACTEA is a member of the **International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE)** which is a global community, sponsored by nine regional associations of theological schools.
4. **Institutional renewal and development:** An important aspect of the accreditation process is a guided self-assessment which leads an institution through a process of review and evaluation in line with widely accepted standards for theological schools at that level. The process of “self-study” is not undertaken simply to impose external standards, but is rather an instrument of

growth designed to improve quality in a particular school’s programs and mission. It allows an institution to measure itself against a wider educational community and work to attain excellence and credibility in the programs it offers.

5. **Exposure to wider evangelical community and resources:** ACTEA provides various educational conferences and forums held throughout the continent and library support services available to its members. These resources and exposure also help to navigate theological influences in Africa’s spiritual climate that threaten to weaken the evangelical truth of the Gospel. Staying connected to an organization like ACTEA can give a school a firmer footing and larger voice in such an environment.

I will now look at possible disadvantages -- or at least concerns associated with ACTEA accreditation.

1. **Misplaced vision:** Accreditation, if not approached with care and discipline, can lead an institution in an unhealthy direction. Simply desiring a higher academic recognition can be driven by wayward motives that prove unhealthy for a theological training institution. The end goal of theological education is not academic recognition from others, but rather the critical need for well-equipped, spirit-filled leaders who serve God and His people and proclaim His truth. The seeking school should ask if pursuing accreditation will indeed help it to better equip the Church with godly leaders.
2. **The cost in resources and effort versus benefits received:** Accreditation is not a necessity for a school to succeed in its mission. It is possible that a school can provide a high standard of theological education and build credibility through its administration and students. ACTEA is one

of the few agencies offering secondary level accreditation and its standards are heavily weighted toward academic excellence. In cases where education is provided on a secondary vocational level, students may rarely pursue further education or seek to transfer credits to other institutions, benefits of accreditation in this case may be limited. A school should ask if it's worth spending resources and time on seeking outside recognition because it may be that the benefits do not outweigh the cost.

- Better alternative options:** In the case of secondary level accreditation, while the school may enjoy increased quality benefits, the extent of outside recognition for transfer purposes will be lower than post-secondary level schools because of the lower academic level. There are alternatives that can work to provide schools with adequate levels of recognition to meet their particular program. An option in some cases is to utilize government recognition. In Swaziland we have recently seen the government establish a formal registration and accrediting system in order to guard against abuses in the educational system. This is a trend that is increasing in Africa; a school might find the cost of pursuing both ACTEA and the requirements of the government to be overtaxing. Another option would be to pursue affiliation with an accredited school of

likeminded values. Such relationships can offer a level of credibility and provide students with further education options. Emmanuel Wesleyan Bible College (EWBC) had such an agreement with Hebron Theological School in South Africa, however regulations from SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) ended the formal agreement for transfer credit. It is interesting that Hebron has continued to accept EWBC students and give the maximum allowed credit because of the quality of students.

Accreditation through ACTEA is not a miracle drug to be used as a quick fix for all issues involved in running an institution. It does, however, have the potential to benefit institutions in areas of quality and public credibility. Given the variety in context of our Wesleyan institutions, careful consideration should be given to both the advantages and possible disadvantages before investing extensive resources and time in the process. I trust this article has been helpful in laying out some of these considerations.

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**Rev. Randal Cheney,**  
**Theological Education Consultant,**  
**Wesleyan Church Africa Area**

**Email:** [randal.cheney@gponline.org](mailto:randal.cheney@gponline.org)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMPOWERING LEADER

Leadership is God's idea for creation. God entrusted creation to Adam and Eve and told them make the Garden of Eden productive and provide leadership, 'Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it' (Gen. 2:15). Leadership in this sense is to provide guidance in the maximization of both human and non-human resources for the good of a particular socio-cultural and political group. In this way, a person or group of persons are identified to lead the process. Where it is expected that the person/s thus identified should guide the process, studies have shown that no one leader succeeds without the support and effort of others. Jethro saw the danger Moses was prone to when he chose to work alone; Jesus saw the need to work with others hence he recruited disciples; the Hellenist Jews were worried when they saw that some work or people were neglected because the disciples were not involving others in doing the work.

These experiences and many others have inspired leaders today to consider very seriously the need to involve and assign certain responsibilities to subordinates in the discharge of their duties. The acts of authorizing subordinate to make certain decisions; the acts of giving assignments or tasks to a person/s; the act of transferring power to someone in an institution or organization is empowering people to become future leaders. A person who empowers other is an empowering leader.

Leadership recruitment and retention are critical for any institution including the Church. An organization that is able to keep excellent leaders is blessed by an empowering leader, a leader who is able to release those around him into their potential. This article is an attempt to

examine the characteristics of an empowering leader. The Church is an organism; therefore those who provide leadership for the Church should consider very seriously the need to empower people for its growth and development.

An empowering leader has unique characteristics that help him to build strong capabilities in those he leads. Jesus is an excellent example of a leader who empowers others; we shall learn from his experiences. This article identifies and discusses six characteristics of an empowering leader.

First, an empowering leader is clear about his vision and communicates it well to his people.

When Jesus called his disciples he was clear about what they were going to do, 'Follow me, I will make you fishers of men' (Matt. 4:19); when the hour came for his death he told them what will happen to him, 'Little children, I shall be with a little while longer. You will seek me, and as I said to the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come...' (Jh. 13:33); before his death he told them that he is going to prepare place where they live with him forever (Jh. 14:1-6). Christ's vision was clear to the minds of the disciples hence; they were determined to carry out his vision. An empowering leader like Jesus should be able to explain his vision to the people he is leading. In defining his vision the leader is able to set the organizational objectives and guides the team towards success.

Second, a leader who empowers values his subordinates. Jesus valued people; this was reflected in the socio-economic background of his disciples, some were fishermen, others were tax collectors and physicians. Jesus valued and

saw in these individuals leadership potential, hence he invested his time in developing this potential. Even when he was criticized for relating with outcasts, Jesus assures his audience that he came to seek the lost. An empowering leader sees great potential in every person. He values thought and skills exhibited by every member of the team. He is aware that every member of the team has something to offer in the growth and development of the organization. He does not dwell on the mistake team members make; he sees gold and not dust. When Peter denied Jesus for the third time Jesus saw in Peter the confession of faith upon which the Church is built rather than a sinner.

Third, a leader who empowers has a succession plan in mind. Jesus' ministry lasted for three years. He knew the act of redemption was completed on the cross but the task of making the redemption message known was incomplete hence he recruited and trained people who would continue with the unfinished task. Before his accession he commissioned his disciples to continue the task of evangelization. An empowering leader is aware that leadership comes and goes away. He/she sees the need to prepare potential leaders who will provide leadership for the institution when his/her leadership expires in the near or distant future.

Fourth, a leader who empowers trusts his team. Jesus trusted his disciples hence he revealed everything about the Kingdom of God to them. At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus declared that his disciples were no longer servants but friends (Jh. 15:12-17). A leader who empowers others is known by the level of trust he/she has for team members. Trust is a huge opportunity for people to work together and build strong relationships. Leaders that trust people to make right decisions find it easier to empower others rather than those who lack trust for people.

Fifth, a leader who empowers rewards any positive behavior. When Peter confessed in the presence of his colleagues that '...Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God' (Mat. 16:16), Jesus affirmed that upon such confession the Church will be built (Mat. 16:18-19). When one of the lepers came back to thank Jesus for healing he rewarded his effort by forgiving his sins. A leader who empowers others is also known by his ability to reward positive behavior of people. Reward can come in the form of praising, thanking, smiling etc. A positive behavior that is rewarded has the tendency to be repeated. When behavior is rewarded it inspires people to speak into their potentials and enable them to rise to their best.

Sixth, an empowering leader is courageous to tell people move beyond their levels. Jesus was such a man who was so courageous to move people beyond their levels. He met Peter as a fisherman; fortunately Jesus saw in Peter PEOPLE rather than FISH hence, he called him to become fisher of men. When he met Matthew he saw in him PEOPLE rather than TAX hence he invited to follow him and become a people collector. Many a time, people in a team are complacent and do not want to move out of their comfort zone. Some are even resistant to move. It takes a sense of courage for a person like an empowering leader to confront people to deal with limiting beliefs, complacency or laziness.

Leadership is God's idea for sustaining creation. Every leader must see it as an opportunity to be part of the process to sustain the institution he/she is serving. Every leader must be prepared to exit and ensure that there is a succession. One way this can be achieved is through empowering team members. Leaders who empower have unique characteristics which include: communicating the organizational vision, valuing those he leads,

having a succession plan in mind, trusting others, rewarding positive behavior and having the courage to reward any positive behavior. Christian leaders must be persons who empower others because the Church is an eternal institution to which every leader is

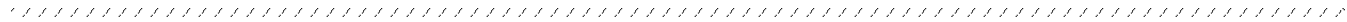
expected to play his part and exit. God bless you as you discover this truth and become an empowering leader.



Rev. Dr. Usman Jesse Fornah
National Superintendent,
Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone

Email: usmanfornah@yahoo.com

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