

PARTNERSHIPS THAT AVOID THE DEPENDENCY SYNDROME.

INTRODUCTION: A partnership may be defined as an arrangement between two or more parties who agree to co-operate to advance their mutual interest. The church in Africa has always been in partnership with Europe or North America for as long as the church has been in existence. The idea of partnership is good if it allows both or all partners equal opportunities to develop their potential for sustainable growth. Each partner is expected to bring something to the table in terms of money, property, labour or skill. I think in the past and probably true to this day that most partnerships with the church in Africa has been like a father and son relationship. Like the saying goes, "He who pays the piper calls the tune." This is not by any means saying that this sort of partnership hasn't worked for the church in Africa, it has. It has brought us this far. Has it always been healthy for the church though?. Has it allowed for the total development of the church or encouraged creativity. The African church needs to form strategic partnerships that will allow it to freely express itself and to be original in its approach to doing church. Most importantly Africa must ask itself what it brings to the table when it talks partnership with our mother church in North America. As long as we are happy to be at the receiving end without contributing our quota towards the success of our common venture, we will continue to be dependent on the goodwill of our partners.

THE GHANA EXPERIENCE

The church in Ghana, like all African churches, started as a result of missionary effort, so right from the beginning there was this partnership between the mother church and us. The unique thing about this partnership is that it was planned with each partner having specific obligations and responsibilities which are all written down. There are regularly scheduled meetings where we set budgets and check adherence to budgetary guidelines and set goals and targets for ourselves. In this partnership, the Ghana church is encouraged to have its own strategic plan drawn so Ghana will determine its own growth and destiny.

It probably sounds like we've got everything under control in Ghana, but that will not be entirely correct. You see, even with this plan, Ghana is still almost a hundred per cent dependent on funding from North America. If for one reason or another money does not come to us for a month or two our whole operation grinds to a halt.

We have two other partnerships going now. There is a church in Michigan, U.S.A which sponsors our Jesus Film Team in the North of Ghana. In the last two or so years we've been developing a partnership with some churches in the Atlantic district which will help the Ghana church place a missionary in Burkina Faso. We are trying to think ahead to avoid some of the situations that could make that work depend unhealthily on Ghana or North America.

LESSONS FROM SIERRA LEONE AND LIBERIA

It is indeed not my intention to remind my brothers of the terrible ravages of war in the two countries, but out of that adversity the churches of these countries have learned the importance of self reliance. Whether or not these lessons leads to revolutionize the way they negotiate future partnerships is yet to be seen. The idea is to go into partnerships now that will help us to be able to carry on with our mandate even if for one reason or the other all missionaries were withdrawn from the African church, which by the way is not so far fetched given the Global Partners emphasis on Europe, the Turkic-Arabic region and the10/40 window.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

It has been the tradition that the African church goes round cap in hand asking whoever would listen for funds to run its operations. That dependency has taken the initiative away from the African church, I think. The church in Africa can and should be self supporting. This can be achieved with the active support and participation of our partners. It is a truism that you can provide a fish for someone and they will eat for a day, but if you teach them how to fish they can eat for the rest of their life. In Ghana many of the Indigenous African Churches, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are self supporting. I am particularly encouraged by the Church of Pentecost which sends out and fully support missionaries to Europe, North America and other African countries all with money generated internally. The emphasis must be on the "teaching them to fish" part.

We must develop partnership that will not only take care of business for today, but will deliberately set out to invest in and empower the African church to generate its own resource base. I know for a fact that in some African countries, if all we did was to depend on tithes and offerings to fund the church, then the church would be dependent for a long time to come.

I know that some people may feel quite uncomfortable talking about money and investments in church but church is both divine and secular, it takes money to do Kingdom work and we should not apologise for making money to do the work of the church.

Look at the work of the Wesleyan Investment Foundation and how it is advancing the work of the church. Can Africa not develop a similar fund? Think of all that may be accomplished under God if we thought outside the box and actually developed a steady reliable source of income for Ghana and the rest of Africa. Our partners must be made to understand that the biggest help they can give to the church in Africa right now is to help us identify some growth areas in our economy where we can invest in to generate income for our work.

Everywhere you go in Africa, I am sure we have similar concerns, there simply is not enough money or resources to carry on with our mandate.

If there is one continent that is blessed with so much natural and human resources, it is Africa. How can the church in Africa be so poor in the midst of plenty?

My brothers and sisters, lets identify some of the things we can do to generate income and recommend them to our partners for support. I am sure that when they realize that we are anxious to help ourselves the will give us a helping hand. There is a saying in my language that translate like this: the one who is climbing a good (fruit) tree deserves to be supported.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY ABOUT ALL THIS?

Africa will continue to partner the church in North America but it must never be a situation where we are always at the receiving end. Our North American partners should be prepared to sit down with leaders in Africa to find out what the real needs are as against what they think should be done. There must be mutual respect for all members of a partnership as to enhance the dignity of all.