

GHANA TO THE NATIONS THE CASE OF CHURCH OF PENTECOST

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1. INTRODUCTION

This presentation is an attempt to use the case of Ghana's Church of Pentecost, one of the largest and fastest-growing indigenous Pentecostal denominations in the West Africa sub-region, as an evaluation of how Church's especially Ghanaian Churches are endeavoring to fulfil the Great Commission mandate.

A. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COP

The origin of the CoP is traced from an indigenous Ghanaian Christian initiative in a remote part of the Eastern Region of Ghana in the early 20th century. However, the CoP locates its historic roots in the British Apostolic Church, in Bradford, England.

This is due to an earlier collaboration between the British Apostolic Church and the group in 1935. Through this collaboration the group became affiliated with the Apostolic church of the UK, headquartered in Bradford, UK as its local branch, becoming the Apostolic Church of Gold Coast (Ghana).

The British Apostolic Church sent its missionary, an Irish, James McKeown to supervise it as its local branch in 1937. The CoP considers as its missionary founder Reverend James McKeown but remains an indigenous Ghanaian initiative. Tracing its history from the arrival of Reverend James McKeown to the Gold Coast in 1937 to the present, the Church has steadily grown with very phenomenal statistics both in Ghana and other parts of the globe.

B. GROWTH STATISTICS

The Church is estimated to be growing or expanding at an annual rate of seven to ten percent. They open an average of between 500 and 1000 churches or congregations or what they call Local Assemblies

every year in their worldwide statistics for the last 10 years. The number of souls won and baptized for the past 10 years is on the average of 250 000 per year. The overall membership of the Church as of 2018 is put at 3, 257, 943 as per attendance in the regular Church register. This is made up of 2, 759, 642 adherents in Ghana and a total of 498, 301 in other nations. In Ghana, the CoP estimates a total of 16, 270 local churches and 5, 532 congregations in other parts of the globe. This paper has outlined some twelve (12) vital indicators accounting for her growth and mission's agenda. And mentioned some challenges confronting the system.

2. FACTORS FOR GROWTH AND MISSIONS

a. Experience and Reliance on the Holy Spirit

The impact that has been noted in the growth and missions of the CoP is as the result of its keen emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit and the outflow of the relationship that its members or adherents and leadership development with him. What constitutes their power generation for living and witnessing, voluntarily and selflessness or rather sacrificially loving and living for Christ and his service is this factor. In whatever class or group of its constituents, children, youth, or adult, experience, dependence, and reliance on the experience and guidance of the Holy Spirit is most prominent.

b. Aggressive Evangelism

Directly following after the experience of the Spirit, as probably is the after effect, is aggressive evangelism. The most obvious reason for the growth and missions of the CoP is that its top priority has always been evangelism both at home and abroad.

In the CoP, the deliberate focus or ultimate purpose for every function or gathering is to win souls through conversions. This includes functions such as child naming ceremonies, birthday celebrations, funeral gatherings, church services, conventions,

rallies, and others. The strategies used include organizing proclamation outward events, small-groups evangelism, and personal evangelism. These are engaged in various forms and specialties. Conventions, Rallies, Mobile Cinema Evangelism, Hospital and Prisons Ministry, Sports Evangelism, Social Media outreaches, Social Intervention Evangelism, Specialized Ministries to different groups (Chiefs, Parliamentarians, prostitutes, LGBT groups, poor and needy, Fulanis, Muslims and other religious groups), dawn broadcasting, schools and colleges evangelism and child evangelism.

The CoP aims at reaching every group or community and peoples of all caliber and status with the gospel. Every individual, including the top leaders of the church, movement or ministries, board or committee, social services and others are all involved in evangelism.

c. Laity Involvement

Evangelism, Church Planting and Missions in the CoP, whether at home or abroad is not the preserve of some specialized few, such as the clergy or some specialized gifted persons involved in evangelism. It is rather the work of the entire church populace including the laity.

d. Vernacularization

This laity involvement is made possible through its vernacularization tradition. Vernacularization in the CoP is given expression through the use of locally-composed choruses and songs, the narration of personal testimony, public Scripture reading, and preaching of sermons in the Church. This makes the outlook of the church simple for indigenous participation and gives a positive response to the gospel.

e. Community Based Local Churches Supervised by lay Leaders

The CoP grows, maintains the spiritual health of its members by its peculiar church planting strategy. The denomination has a close-knit congregational system. The churches are community-based and are supervised by lay leaders. The members are encouraged to fellowship within the community closet in proximity, where they will be identified, pastored, and discipled. In this pattern, they are trained to use their lifestyle to influence their community for the gospel.

f. Functional Ministries

The CoP operates with five functional ministries (Evangelism, Women, Men, Youth and Children). The purpose is to maintain each group with its peculiar demands and use it to reach its kind. But the evangelism ministry overlaps in all the ministries. Each functional ministry has enshrined in its aims and objectives for operation the winning of souls for Christ. In that regard, every member of the church is a member of the Evangelism Ministry together with being a member of any of the rest. It is this evangelism ministry that is responsible for equipping, training, mobilizing and deploying the entire church for the work of evangelism and church planting. But its task is to equip each member to have evangelism as a lifestyle, learn to witness for Christ everywhere and plant churches in their communities or sojourning places. Planting of Churches in the CoP is the initiative of any member.

g. Pentecost International Worship Centers (PIWC)

However, for the CoP to remain relevant and become available to all classes of people the church periodically adopts innovations to address every change. One of such innovations is the establishment of Pentecost International Worship Centers (PIWC). The PIWC innovation seeks to create Bible-based contemporary churches to meet a specific audience. These identified groups include highly qualified professionals and academicians, young people who are drifting to other denominations due to unfamiliarity with the local or traditional languages and the form of liturgy. And others who cannot communicate or understand the vernaculars, such as diplomats, missionaries, and expatriates. These are also equipped to send the gospel to their nations.

h. Home and Urban Missions (HUM)

Following that same pattern as the PIWCs, the Church has rolled out other evangelistic outreach innovations as responses to current developments. One of such is the Home and Urban Missions (HUM). The focus of the HUM is to extend to ministry to people of northern extracts in southern Ghana and other migrants such as Fulanis and other neglected communities who migrate to Ghana from countries such as Niger, Burkina Faso, L’Cote d’Ivoire, Togo; Nigeria, China and a large community of Indians and Lebanese.

i. Ministry to People with Disability (PWDs)

Closely related to the HUM, is ministering to people with disabilities in society. These include physically impaired, hearing impaired, blind, Albinism and others. Persons with disabilities are considered the world's largest minority group. It is estimated that 15%, 1.2 billion of the world's population are PWDs and in Ghana over 5million.

j. Missions Structures and Strategies of CoP

The CoP strategically separates Evangelism Department and Missions Department. The Evangelism Department is headed by the Evangelism Ministry Directorate. It is aimed at or focuses on the proclamation of the gospel, mobilization and motivation for practical evangelism (organization of proclamation outreach events, small group evangelism, and personal evangelism), discipling and equipping of the saints for outreach (including preparing adequate material for studies on evangelism) and planting of churches locally and internationally.

The Missions Department and structures are very unique. It is manned by an organized missions board and an international mission's director. The board has the head of the Church as its chairman. There is a centralized missions directorate that coordinate all the affairs and correspondences of the mission's activities both at home and abroad. And the international mission's director looks after the day to day running on the mission's directorate. Its scope is to organize missions' conferences, train and send out missionaries, especially out of Ghana, creation of mission's awareness, coordinating all the work of the churches out of Ghana and some places in Ghana designated as mission area due to their deprivation and mobilize and disburse finances for the upkeep and other details on missions. The modus operandi of the mission's department is to ensure that missions are established, maintained and sustained in the nations until they become autonomous of the Ghana branch.

k. System of locating field workers, reporting, evaluation and monitoring

An important factor worth mentioning that affects the success of the CoPs evangelism and mission's

agenda is their system of posting or moving field workers from one place to the other. This is done every year. Ministers are shifted and changed to different locations. Others are sent to places which demand their services but will otherwise not have been there by any circumstances. Though this system might have its challenges I consider its positive effects to outweigh its negatives. The church also has in place a consistent system for reporting, evaluation, and monitoring of the activities.

l. Financing evangelism and missions' activities

CoP has its headquarters in Ghana. Much of its finances for missions everywhere comes from Ghana. Due to its historic precedence, the church in Ghana is careful not to import monies from other nations into Ghana. The missionaries sent from Ghana are sponsored from Ghana. How then does the CoP finance such a huge budget without relying on external donors? The denomination had learned quite early not to be dependent on foreign funds or borrowing from others such as financial institutions.

The finances are mobilized through the voluntary giving of tithes and offerings by its members. The mission's department however has a week set aside for mission's promotion dubbed McKeown's missions' week". In this annual week celebration awareness towards the cause of propagation of the gospel is made and voluntary donations are given. There is always a monthly fund called "Missions Offering" which is giving every month after the Lord's supper. These funds are not added to the main church's finances. They are set aside exclusive to be managed by the mission's board. These and other voluntary donations from the generosity of the member keeps the church missions going.

m. Challenges to Address

The above is an outline of some positive innovations CoP has adopted in its evangelism and missions. The Church, however, acknowledges many challenges.

In fact, at every evaluation session, there are discoveries of many areas which also shows inadequacies that requires improvement. For instance, the passion and zeal for the members to engage in Evangelism fluctuates. In terms of mobilization of money anytime there is economic

turndown the CoP is affected in a way that translates into its mission obligations. In the mission field, Visa acquisition and other national barriers had restrained the easy sending of personnel to designated mission destinations.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has sought to outline briefly, how CoP as a denomination is moving from Ghana with the gospel of Christ into other nations. Factors responsible for her growth included experience and reliance on the Holy Spirit, aggressive evangelism, Laity involvement, vernacularization, community-based local churches supervised by lay leaders, functional ministries, PIWCs, Home and Urban Missions, and Ministry to persons with disability. The paper also discussed missions' structures and strategies, systems for locating field workers, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. Mention has been on how missions in CoP is Financed.

Some challenges confronting the Church's missions

have also been detailed for discussion. I trust that this brief information will help and encourage this meeting to generate a good discussion to help promote our cooperate evangelism and mission's agenda should Jesus tarry.

End Notes

1. For information on the initial history of the CoP see E. Kafui Asem (ed), *A History of the Church of Pentecost*, Vol. 1. (Accra: Pentecost Press, 2005)
2. See CoP, "State of the Church Address" 16th Session of the Extraordinary Council Meetings, Held at Pentecost Convention Centre, Gomoa Fetteh, on 8th -11th May, 2019, 25
3. A. J. Markin, *Transmitting the Spirit in missions: The History and Growth of the Church of Pentecost*, (USA: Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 83

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