

# THE STORY OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH FELLOWSHIP – *Ghana's first indigenous Mission Agency*



**A**t a Scripture Union Easter House Party at the Presbyterian Women's Training College at Aburi in 1974, the course of Evangelisation in Ghana took another dimension. Christian Church leaders met and on this historical occasion came to the realisation that something drastic had to be done if the people of Ghana were ever to be reached for Christ. From this meeting came the idea of a Ghanaian missionary sending fellowship that would reach out everywhere in the country and evangelise the unreached people of Ghana and beyond. In 1975 this vision was realised through the formation of the Christian Outreach Fellowship.

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What forcefully propelled them to take a definite action during the 1974 Easter House Party was the result of Bible Studies discussions they had. The story of the four lepers in the Old Testament was very instructive to them especially the words of the four lepers "we shouldn't be doing this! We have good news and shouldn't keep it to ourselves". According to the founders, those words drove home to them their sin and lack of love for their unsaved brothers and sisters in Ghana.

They applied the truth of the scripture to themselves

and said that they who had received the good news of salvation in Christ should share it with those who have not received the good news yet. According to them the call for action was clear, inescapable and urgent. They inferred that they were a generation of Christians who were products of the missionary outreach of Europeans and Americans initiated in the nineteenth century. They realised that they were the ones who should be God's instruments to complete His work in Ghana. They recognized that the mantle was on their shoulders to take the gospel of Christ to their brothers and sisters in the unevangelised and unchurched communities."

Two committees, the Accra Working Committee and the Kumasi Working Committee were formed to articulate those ideas and concerns with the view of formalising the formation of a missionary society. The Accra Working Committee had Mr. William

Ofori Atta as its chairman and Rev. Dr. Grau, Rev. Peter Barker, Mr. James Binka, Rev. Tei-Kwabla, Prof. Kwamina Bentsil Enchill, Miss Selsie Sawyer, Miss Juliana Amo Addae (later Mrs Senavoe) and Mr. Ransford Senavoe as the core members

The Kumasi Working Committee had the following as its members. Dr. Nathaniel Sodzi as chairman, Dr. Sam Adjei, Mr. N.O. Henaku, Mr. Bill Chapman, Mr. Victor Kpodo, Mr. Ross Campbell, Mr. Felix Maafo, Mr. H.N.A, Wellington,

Mr. Isaac Ababio, Dr. D.O. Gyane, Mr. J.N. Okyere, Rev. Kleinsasser and Rev. E. H, Brew Riverson as members. By the following year (1975) a constitution drawn by Rev. Dr. E Grau, with some modifications suggested by the joint-working committees, was accepted. On the afternoon of 29 March 1975 during another Easter House Party held in Kuma-

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si, Christian Outreach Fellowship was inaugurated. The inaugural ceremony was officiated by Dr. D.O. Gyane and Dr. Nathaniel Sodzi.

## KEY PEOPLE BEHIND COF

William Ofori Atta was one of the sons of Nana Sir Ofori Atta, the Paramount Chief of Akim Abuakwa. Paa Willie as he was popularly called was a nephew of Dr. J. B. Danquah, popularly acclaimed as the doyen of Gold Coast politics.

Paa Willie was an economist, teacher, politician and lawyer before coming to know Christ as his Lord and Saviour. He was a founding member of the United Gold Coast Convention after his undergraduate studies in the United Kingdom. He was later to be immortalized as one of the illustrious Big Six.

As a die-hard democrat, he often clashed with autocratic and military regimes and served five terms as a political prisoner. One of his imprisonments was in 1964 during the regime of Kwame Nkrumah under the Preventive Detention Act. His only reading material in prison was a Bible. Reading the Bible with critical legal eyes he came to the certain conclusion that the Bible was the absolute truth and everything else paled by comparison to it? He was born again at the age of 54. Paa Willie's late conversion transformed him into a twentieth century Paul. His release from prison after the 1966 coup d'etat marked the beginning of a remarkable career as an evangelist and Christian leader that spanned for twenty-four years".

At the age of sixty-four Paa Willie was at the Scripture Union Easter House Party with men and women who only qualified to be his children when the vision to form an indigenous missionary organization was born. He became one of the Trustees and chairman. Paa Willie's humility and passion for evangelism and for that matter the C.O.F. vision informed his decision to step in to accept the position of Field Director when others were reluctant to assume that responsibility. He worked tirelessly creating mission awareness, surveying the mission field and mobilizing prayer support by forming C.O.F. core Groups until his retirement in 1987 at the age of 77. Paa Willie died the following year 1988 at the age of 78.

Isaac Ababio came to Christ as a student at Accra Academy. And later at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, he was

drawn into evangelism to reach out to surrounding villages. After attending the Berlin Congress on Evangelism, he decided to devote his full-time to this work. After studies at the Melbourne Bible Institute in Australia he taught at Papua New Guinea. He returned to Ghana in 1974 and participated in the Easter House Party at Aburi that saw the birth of C.O.F.

Isaac was the founder of the Hour of Visitation Evangelistic Association (HOVCEA). He was one of the pioneer teachers at the Christian Service College and the first to be offered the responsibility of Field Director of CO.F. in 1975 during the first Council Meeting.

Dr. Nathaniel Sodzi did his Postgraduate studies at Birmingham in the United Kingdom where he was chosen as the president of the Christian Union in the year 1963-64. From 1965 he taught electrical engineering at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. He also completed his doctorate degree at Birmingham.

At the University campus where he taught, Dr. Sodzi and other Christian intellectuals of the Scripture Union background often met to discuss and pray about the evangelisation of Ghana and beyond. It was with this burden that he went to the Scripture Union Easter House Party in 1974 which culminated in the

formation of C.O.F. to carry the gospel to the unreached. Dr. Sodzi was the second trustee when the constitution of COF was promulgated in 1975. He was the Chairman of the Kumasi Working committee which did preparatory work on the formation of C.O.F. He eventually became the elected Vice Chairman of C.O.F. during the maiden Annual General Meeting in 1975.

Some lost their lives in line of duty and others lost their loved ones on the mission fields as they laboured in the King's service. But their temporary loss has brought gain to the Kingdom of God

Ransford Senavoe had been secretary of the Scripture Union group at Amedzofe Training College in 1961-62. When he taught at Oda Secondary School,

he was Patron of the Scripture Union group, besides starting three other groups as well as the Oda Town Fellowship." After his studies at the Oklahoma Baptist University in the United States of America, he returned to serve as Scripture Union Travelling Secretary in 1974. Ransford was one of the founders of C.O.F. and was the first Secretary of the Fellowship. He was also appointed as the convener of the Committee for prayer and Retreats.

In 1976, Ransford married Juliana Amo-Addae an ardent Christian and together they pursued further studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and returned in 1979 to teach at the Christian Service College, Kumasi. Julie, was also very actively involved in the formation of CO.F. She was co-responsible for preparing the way for the formation of CO.F. Ransford died in 1990 while Juliana passed away in August 2004.

Madam Regina Addae, fondly called "Mama Regina" with her late husband Professor Kwamina Bentsi-Enchill were co-founders of C.O.F. The first meetings of C.O.F. were held in the home of the couple and at the Apra House that belonged to Auntie Regina. She was appointed the first Trustee of C.O.F. when the constitution came into being in 1975. She paid for the rent of Isaac Ababio when he was appointed the Field Director and donated a property at Kitase to C.O.F. to be used as guest house and also a retreat centre. In her 90's, she is currently running a ministry known as Christian Women in Leadership, which undertakes prayer retreats and also trains young women in income generating skills.

Dr. D.O. Gyane, son of a Kwahu trader, qualified as a Pharmacist from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in 1966. After his doctoral studies at Strathclyde University in Scotland, he returned to his alma mater to teach. Dr. Gyane was involved in the University Students' All For Christ Campaigns. One of such which took place in Nkwatia his hometown, proved to be a landmark. The students' expectation of special blessings in the Holy Spirit were amply fulfilled as one after another spoke in tongues and some prophesied. Thus Dr. Gyane with his compatriots on the KNUST campus were burdened for the total evangelisation of Ghana and began doing something about it in their own small way. It was with this burden that he went to the Scripture Union Easter House Party where they were further challenged about that need that culminated in the formation of C.O.F. He was appointed as the fourth trustee and also elected as a Council Member during the maiden Annual General Meeting in 1975.

During the maiden Annual General Meeting, the first officers of the fellowship were elected as follows: Mr. William Ofori Atta - chairman unopposed, Dr. Nathaniel Sodzi -vice chairman unopposed, Mr. Felix Marfo - Treasurer, Mr. Ransford Senavoe - Secretary. Other members included Mr. Isaac Ababio, Mr. T.B. Dankwa, Miss Mary Osei, Mr. Yaw Oppong. Mr. Ross Campbell, Mr. James Binka and Mr. Donald Theobold. The AGM also suggested Mr. Felix Sakyi and Mr. R.B. Perbi as auditors.

### Aims and Activities of C.O.F.

In their inaugural speeches delivered at the Scripture Union Easter House Party in Kumasi on 29th March 1975, Dr. Sodzi outlined the aims, activities and expected outcomes of the Christian Outreach Fellowship as follows:

**1. Creation of Missions Awareness:** According to the founders, C.O.F. would be responsible to whip up missionary interest for believers who are burdened to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to the unreached. They re-echoed the general lack of missionary awareness and involvement by Ghanaian Christians in actual missionary work. To them Christian Outreach Fellowship should exist to correct this phenomenon. It was agreed that Paa Willie should travel across the length and breadth of Ghana especially the major cities and towns to meet with Christians to sensitise them about the vision of Christian missions. He succeeded in forming Core Groups in Towns like Ho, Winneba, Cape Coast, Takoradi, and Kumasi etc, where Christians met to discuss about missions and to pray for same. It was through his travels that he met a young man Philemon Bansa who decided to offer himself for service and later became a missionary. He was sponsored by the Winneba Core Group to undertake Biblical Studies at the Christian Service College. It was as a result of this that a large mailing list consisting of Businessmen, Professionals, Politicians, Office workers and Farmers were compiled which is being updated from time to time and new members are added.

**2. Data Collation And Dissemination of Information:** They also said that C.O.F. would commit itself to research and the dissemination of useful information for the promotion of missionary work in order that Christians would be awakened to the need of surveying the regions, districts, towns and villages to identify areas in Ghana which are unevangelised and unreached.

This vision was achieved through the Ghana Evangelism Committee, with Ross Campbell as the director. When Ross, a co-founder of C.O.F. decided to embark on a national survey in 1986 he got the full support of C.O.F. When the work started in the Brong Ahafo Region, Paa Willie was part of it." By 1989 a church survey on Ghana had been completed and a National Conference of Church Leaders was convened and the information was shared. That exercise woke most churches up to catch some a fresh vision for evangelism and missions culminating in the formation of mono ethnic churches for unreached northerners in the south by major denominational churches including the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Church of Pentecost.

**3. Mobilisation of Missionaries:** It was said that Christian Outreach Fellowship would exist to mobilise Christians who feel called to full-time missionary service to offer themselves for resident service among unreached communities. They cited the problem and lack of direction of many young and enthusiastic freelance evangelists in Ghana as the need for the formation of Christian Outreach Fellowship. They said this group of Christians needed to be guided, trained, and helped as much as possible since they understood the culture and tradition of the Ghanaian people and hence were better placed to communicate the gospel to their own people. Since its inception COF has ministered in 12 out of the 16 regions of Ghana. The only regions COF's ministry has not touched directly are the Ashanti, Ahafo, Western and Central regions.

COF has since the early 1980s when it sent out its six pioneer missionaries namely, Evans Atiamoah (Mafi Mission Field), Edith Larbi (Klonu), Francis Kupoe and Anthony Kupoe (Chiana), Mary Magdalene Adotey, (Tamale) and Joshua Aryee (Ga Rural), the work force has increased to over two hundred full time and volunteer workers who are serving the Lord in various ministry areas in Ghana.

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Paa Willie's son, Mr Bernard Ofori-Atta followed in his fathers steps to serve with COF. He became the Executive Director and served faithfully for many years and was succeeded by Mr. Emmanuel Anukum-Dabson who is the current Executive Director.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The LORD has used C.O.F. to plant over 700 churches some of which have been handed over to various church denominations. COF has worked and still working among various people groups in Ghana. Notable people groups that COF had engaged before include Ewe, Ga and Brossa (Enchi, Western North). Currently, COF is reaching out to twenty

people groups that include the Dagomba, Konkomba, Mamprusi, Gonja, Tampulma, Wala, Dagaaba, Kasem, Frafra, Builsa and the Kusasi. Others include the Jula, Ffulde, Ligbi, Kotokoli, Birifor, Komba, Lobi, Kantosi and Chala.

Apart from preaching the gospel, COF also engages in advocacy and social interventions to bring relief and transformation to the communities the workers minister.

There is no shadow of doubt to the fact that the advocacy that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s that culminated in the abolition of the obnoxious Trokosi system was as a result of what was witnessed and reported by COF missionaries, Edith Larbi and Evans Atiamoah in the Agave and Mafi mission fields respectively in the Volta region. The collaborative work by COF, International Needs and later governmental agencies led to the banning of the Trokosi system. It must be noted that it was through one of the collaborative travels that Evans was involved in a motor accident at the Tetteh Quarshie interchange and lost his life.

COF has engaged communities in the Komba area in the Gushiegu district to change the beliefs and attitude towards old women who are often accused of witchcraft. Women who were accused of witchcraft and residing at the Nabuli 'Witches Camp' were cared for to bring relief and dignity to them.

A vocational school was founded in Nayoko near Bawku to train and empower young women who would have been married off to older men owing to

economic pressures faced by their families. Young men are equally benefitting from carpentry and masonry training offered at the centre.

Basic schools were also started in Jangbarayili village and Kulorwurape in the Central Gonja district of the Savannah region and also Dama Nkwanta in the Pru West district in the Bono East region to cater for the educational needs of the children and prepare leaders in those communities for the next generation.

In addition to the above-mentioned interventions, COF has also offered economic empowerment skills to women groups and offered micro credit to same to bring economic transformation to families. Through bullock and plough and animal husbandry projects, the volunteer workers were resourced to enable them obtain some form of income for their families while they engaged in the work of ministry.

## CONCLUSION

Before 1974, the concept of missions was alien to the Ghanaian churches and Christians. Before then,

sending the gospel to the remote and unevangelised areas in Ghana remained the preserve of Western mission agencies and missionaries. However, following the birth of COF, an indigenous ministry, the narrative has changed. The vision and passion of Ghanaian young men and women were awakened to send the gospel to the unreached and unengaged people in remote and deprived areas of Ghana. They have suffered physically, emotionally, economically as they offered themselves for this glorious task.

Some lost their lives in line of duty and others lost their loved ones on the mission fields as they laboured in the King's service. But their temporary loss has brought gain to the Kingdom of God. Many souls were saved and many churches have been planted and lives have been transformed as converts forsook their idols and renounced evil habits of drunkenness etc and embraced discipleship lessons that have restored once lost dignity to themselves, their families and communities. Glory be to God!