

Partnership visit to Methodist Church Nigeria from 17th April – 23rd April 2017

Aims – To meet with the Prelate of MC Nigeria (MCN) and the new Secretary of Conference
To meet with MC Nigeria Kaduna Diocese and PROCMURA Office Kaduna
To discuss various partnership issues

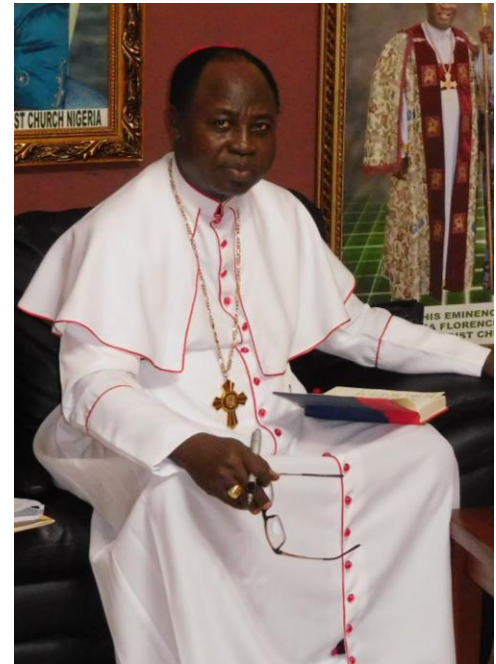
Income generating idea for West African Methodist Conference

I attended a forum organised by the Lagos State Development Authority held on Tuesday 18th April at Oko Oba – Agege in Lagos at 10am. This was a government initiative to invite enterprises interested in Agri-business to generate income, create employment and encourage public-private partnerships. It offered insight on prospects and challenges of promoting food security and as well as addressing environmental issues in West Africa. It was an opportunity to understand issues facing our partners in this region namely MC Nigeria, EPM Benin and MC Ghana particularly as annual grant allocation was under review.

Meeting with Prelate Uche and the new Secretary of Conference (SoC) – Bishop Akinwale

The next day I had a meeting with the Prelate and the Secretary of Conference at Yaba – Lagos. In light of the impending changes to MCB grant allocations, I needed to understand the vision, aspirations and mission priorities of MCN as a partner and consider ways of optimising efficiencies.

- The Prelate shared the challenge of reducing church memberships in urban areas due to competition from growing Pentecostal churches within the country. MCN core vision has been to grow numerically, spiritually, financially and to improve its infrastructure. Recent years have witnessed more emphasis on promoting spirituality to build faith and increase commitment of members to enable it discharge its mission activities more efficiently. The good news was that church membership in rural dwellings has been stable and MCN hopes to consolidate efforts to avoid drop in numbers.
- Following the creation of the Africa Methodist Council in 2015-16, we discussed ways MC Nigeria could strengthen its regional and continental links with other MC conferences. The Prelate plans to visit MC the Gambia sometime in 2017 and EPM Benin in July 2017 to maintain regional partnerships. MCN already has a strong link with MC Ghana and it is considering ways of improving relations with Eastern and Southern Methodist Conferences through the Africa desk at MC House in London.
- Prelate Uche informed me of hosting few MCB Theology lecturers for Methodist Theological Institute on the same day of our meeting. Probably Dr Stephen Skuce was leading the visiting lecturers' team. MCN plans to start providing MTh degree courses in addition to some refresher courses at MTI Sagamu. Henceforth university degrees would be minimum for enrolment to cut down on numbers. In light of this, MCN



Bishop Akinwale – Secretary of Conference



Prelate Samuel Uche – Head of the Methodist Church Nigeria

Conference has approved to also upgrade of the Theological College at Zonkwa – Kaduna State. As from 2017, the college will offer undergraduate courses in addition to existing certificate and diploma courses. This should increase the number of enrolments from Northern Nigeria because it is the only Methodist Theological institution in Northern Nigeria. Prelate Uche also mentioned that MC Nigeria wishes to re-introduce adult literacy programmes within the rural communities to improve participation of adult females in leadership roles in rural churches. In addition it is hoped this would also positively impact social, spiritual, economic and community living in villages.

- The Secretary of Conference (SoC) shared how MCN hopes to utilize the land at Ugwuaku in Abia State to become a demonstration farm for youths. The church aims to offer vocational training in Agri-business as well as raising funds to procure and produce farm products. He expects the programme to address food insecurity as well as provide skills and employment for interested youths. MCN has been updating its properties to accommodate prospective participants and trainers. The church considers this an opportunity to engage Nigerian youths and dissuade them from immigrating to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea in search of employment. The SoC asked about the possibility of attracting support and skilled personnel from donors or individuals. He was concerned about financing this mission priority when annual grants are stopped in the nearest future
- Also of interest to the SoC were ministerial and youth exchanges that took place in the nineteen eighties and he asked if these could be organised again? He commented on how such experiences strengthened relations, inspired new ideas and promoted collaboration without creating dependency. MCN would be interested particularly in ministerial exchange as a form of leadership training and exposure of its leaders to another Methodist Conference in this era of globalisation. I encouraged the SoC to send a formal request on this issue.

Visit to MC Nigeria Kaduna Synod

After a long day of travel, I arrived Kaduna late at night. The next morning was the first day of the Kaduna Synod meeting that was held at the Methodist Cathedral on Constitutional Road in Kaduna. Due to religious violent attacks within Kaduna City earlier in the decade, three different Methodist congregations had relocated onto the same premises as the cathedral for safety. In addition were the archbishop's manse, a primary school and a nursery school. These different congregations retain their historical identities however; church membership has been dropping in numbers with people relocating to safer cities. Archbishop Sunday Idoko, the Synod Bishop met with me before the Synod gathering and I later travelled about 200 kilometres from Kaduna to Zonkwa accompanied and driven in a vehicle by Rev Ali Shettima. At the Methodist Theological College in Zonkwa, I met with the College lecturers since students were still off on Easter break.



Few lecturers of Zonkwa Theological College on site

Methodist Theological College in Zonkwa

The lecturers were delighted about the upgrade of the College, the new undergraduate courses in addition to certificate and diploma theological courses. They commented that the new curriculum could potentially attract students from all over the country and become a diverse student population. Consequently, a higher quality standard of theological education that meets university standard is expected e.g. have a well-equipped library, operate secure internet service and offer a computer suite for research etc. The lecturers should demonstrate great and diverse competencies as well as provide standard facilities for staff and students. The administrative block is under construction to accommodate more lecturers and a private donor had funded the construction of a few on-site accommodation for 2017-18 student intake. Lecturers asked MCB for opportunities for attend refresher courses and network with other theologians. They were delighted about the progress made so far even though more services were still needed on site



Bunmi at the Zonkwa Theological College

e.g. student clinic for emergency, cross-cultural training of lecturers, providing good dining facilities, administrative support for staff and students etc. There was also the need for students to work closely with churches for diaconal practical training in nearby communities and where possible the school seeks to offer scholarship at least one of the most promising student interested in ministry but unable to afford the school fees. Rev Shettima as the Rector of the college commented that the initiative would strengthen relations with nearby communities and reduce animosity and clashes with other religion.

During an earlier discussion with Archbishop Idoko, he confirmed that Kaduna Methodist Synod was struggling financially to help the Theological College and was very grateful for the support received from the World Mission Fund. The social instability caused by insurgencies has affected former thriving churches in cities and towns. Many non-indigenes were relocating elsewhere however; rural churches in Southern Kaduna have had a stable church membership number. The drastic drop in urban church membership has adversely affected funding of local and regional mission activities.



PROCMURA Area Representatives in Kaduna - Nigeria

Meeting at the International Centre for Inter-Faith Peace and Harmony Office, Kaduna

The ongoing famine in North Eastern Nigeria publicised by the media and on BBC news in March 2017 was because of the frequent terrorist attacks in Northern Nigeria. Farming activities were disrupted, livelihoods destroyed and displaced. In light of this, MC Britain kindly gave a solidarity grant of £10,000 to affected victims to provide food especially to the vulnerable victims. The Programme of Christian-Muslim Relations for Africa (PROCMURA) area representatives led by Rev Joshua Mallam would administer relief to victims. During my visit, I heard how precarious the situation was on the ground and that kidnapping was still going on in communities.

Many affected families were on constant move for safety and there has been high level of suspicion within camps. The advantage of working with PROCMURA/ ICIPH has been their credibility and fairness in serving all victims. Logistics of food distribution to displaced families was given priority and where possible clothing, collected locally for victims to reduce exposure to pneumonia and malaria with the onset of the rainy season. At the international centre I visited, all staff were 50% Christians and 50% Muslims and this helps in reaching all beneficiaries. A full report on relief distribution would be submitted afterwards.

1 John 5¹⁴⁻¹⁵ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him (NKJV).

Thank you

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Internally displaced families in Northern Nigeria