

Partnership Coordinator for Africa

Visit to Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea

11 September – 2 October 2023



Purpose of Visit:

- **To attend the Commissioning of new Methodist Church HQ (Wesley Towers) in Accra, Ghana.**
 - **To attend the meeting of African Methodist Council (AMC) Executive in Accra, Ghana.**
 - **To meet with the new Presiding Bishop in Kenya.**
 - **To visit Mission Partner, Claire Smithson.**
- **To visit projects supported by MCB in Methodist Church, Tanzania.**
 - **To visit the Methodist Church in Uganda.**
- **To visit Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris-Chapman, Mission Partners in Uganda.**
- **To visit Equatorial Guinea for the first time and to understand local context, current issues and priorities.**
 - **To share and update partners with developments at MCB.**
 - **To discuss and share vision for future partnership.**

Rev. Dr. Andrew Ashdown

Visit to Ghana.

11th – 13th September 2023

The purpose of my visit to Ghana was twofold:

- To attend the Commissioning of the new Headquarters of the Methodist Church in Ghana, Wesley Towers, Accra.
- To attend the Meeting/Retreat of the new Executive of the Africa Methodist Council in Accra, which I was also invited to address.

Wesley Towers, Accra.

The history of this site begins in 1835 when the first Methodist Missionary, Joseph Dunwell, rented Standfast Hall in Cape Coast and established it as the centre of Methodist Missions to the Gold Coast. In 1925, the HQ was moved to Accra and in 1947, a 3-acre plot of land was bought in the residential district of Accra on which the Synod Office of the Methodist Church in Gold Coast was built, along with the a Manse. In 1961, a 3-storey Office Block was built to house the growing Synod administrative staff.

Meanwhile, the area in which the 3-acre plot of land had been purchased in Accra, began from 1957, to be developed into a Business Centre for the growing city and in time became the Central Business District – a prime location consisting of the most valuable Real Estate in the country. It was therefore realised that commercial redevelopment of some of the land would be a wise use of resources which could support the growth of the Methodist Church.

It was not until 2018, under the leadership of the current Presiding Bishop, Most Revd. Dr. Paul Kwabena Boafo and following many visionary discussions by previous Presiding Bishops, that the construction of an impressive Connexional Office, worthy of the location, could be implemented,. Finally, a design was approved and contracted to the China State Hualong Construction Company, who won the competition for the bid.

Wesley Towers is a 16-storey Tower block., comprising three ‘boxes’ of 2, 3 and 4 storeys each. This trinity of boxes is separated by glassed-in one-storey floors, all stacked on a 3-storey podium, with two basements below ground. The three boxes have been proportioned to a 2-3-3 rhythm representing the International Dialling Code of Ghan (+233). They face in both left and right directions representing the all-embracing ministry of the Methodist Church, Ghana. On the front elevation, a Cross spans seven storeys above a canopy shaped like a dove. A pool of water and musical fountain playing Methodist Hymns stands at the entrance.

The Tower contains a car park, fifteen office floors, a Conference Centre, including a large Conference Hall and Restaurant. The building also includes Guest Apartments for visiting Guests to the Methodist Church Ghana. Several floors will be rented out for Office Space. The building is intended to be a visible symbol of the Methodist Church’s presence at the heart of the spiritual life of Ghana, and to serve the Church’s ministry, both in the facilities that it offers, and in the income that it will generate on a daily basis.

The Commissioning was attended by the country's Vice-President, His Excellency Dr. Mahamdu Bawumia, who is himself a Methodist and who pointed out that Wesley Towers now adds physical beauty and a symbolic reminder to the City of Accra that is visible across the Central District.



Wesley Towers, Accra. Ghana.

African Methodist Council Executive Meeting, Accra. 12th/13th September 2023.

It was a privilege to attend the meeting of the new Executive of the Africa Methodist Council and also to be invited to give the Opening Address on 'Strategic Coalitions for Sustainable Impact in Africa: A Way Forward.'

The objectives of the Africa Methodist Council are:

- To explore ways of maximising African input at the World Methodist Council.
- To build capacity for a sustainable Pan African Methodist Leaders Network.
- To identify opportunities for mutual collaboration, dialogue, sharing of gifts and resources.
- To discern what God might be calling Methodists in the Continent of Africa to do jointly.
- To facilitate an All African Methodist Youth Development Initiative.
- To increase Ministry Outreach and collaboration for Evangelism within and among Conferences leading to significant Church Growth.
- To modernise communication and IT infrastructure in member Conferences and intensify its utilisation in the operations of AMC.

- To resource and strengthen the Secretariat to effectively perform its coordinating and promotional roles.
- To positively influence the transformation of the socio-political and economic landscape of Africa.
- To develop international strategic partnerships with external Methodist Groups and other evangelical Christian bodies in fulfilment of the Great Commission globally.

It is recognised that resources from British, other European Methodist Churches and other denominations are dwindling and therefore that there is a great need to promote self-sustainability and income-generation capacity within African connexions.

The Africa Methodist Council is keen to explore and develop ways of partnership and relationship internationally that enhance connectivity, exchange, dialogue and sharing of experience so that we may learn from one another and empower one another in the service of mission and fulfilling God's call.

Visit to Kenya. 14th – 17th September 2023

Following the uncertainties of recent events in the Methodist Church in Kenya and the election of the new Presiding Bishop, Revd Isaiah Deye, it was both a privilege and a pleasure to meet with Bishop Isaiah and members of the Connexional Staff at the Kenya Methodist Headquarters in Nairobi. Discussions were held alone with Bishop Isaiah and with members of the staff. Afterwards I had lunch with the Bishop and a couple of the Connexional Team.

Summary of main points from meeting with Bishop Isaya Deye:

- The Methodist Church in Kenya is keen to maintain and continue to strengthen the historic relationship with the Methodist Church in Britain.
- Bishop Isaiah will seek to be a healing, unifying Bishop and is committed to full transparency and accountability in all management and governance matters.
- Bishop Isaiah will undertake an audit on previous financial affairs.
- Bishop Isaiah is happy for MCB to deal directly with Methodist Church Uganda on any grant and financial matters, as long as he is copied in to relevant correspondence and informed of transactions made, to ensure Connexional awareness and accountability.
- Bishop Isaiah would like MCB to send grant funds that are for Tanzania through Kenya. The funds will reach Tanzania in full, but the arrangement is in order to enable MCK to fully support Tanzania in maximising the impact of any grant support and assist in the efficient implementation of project proposals in order to ensure future self-sustainability.

I also travelled to Meru to visit the Bio-Intensive Agricultural Centre and to meet with our Mission Partner, Dr. Claire Smithson.

The uncertainty of the future status of Lay Mission Partners is an ongoing matter of concern for Claire and for the Methodist Church in Kenya. Dr. Claire is the best qualified and only trainer of nurses for the treatment and care of HIV patients in Kenya and is currently training nurses nationally. The Health Service in Kenya are deeply concerned at the impact of her loss on HIV health care in Kenya.



With Bishop Isaya Deye & MCK Connexional Staff. Nairobi.

Visit to Methodist Church Tanzania. 18th – 21st September 2023

From Meru, I drove for two days via Nakuru and Kericho, to cross the border into NE Tanzania and visit our partners there for three days. My base during this time was the town of Tarime, some 18km from the Kenya/Tanzania border. I was joined for these few days by Bishop Ndaki, Rev. Peter Andrew, Chaplain for disabilities, and Rev. Ibrahim, Coordinator for Mission of the Methodist Church in Tanzania.

Visit to Mugango Circuit. Lake Victoria.

Mugango is typical of the Circuits in this part of Tanzania - a rural village by Lake Victoria 40 minutes along unmade roads from the nearest town of Musoma. Most of the population are farmers though droughts in recent years have seriously affected crop yields and the quality of the soil. It is difficult to grow sufficient crops to make a living.

The Methodist Church was established in 2000 and was given 6 acres of land. This is currently farmed but the quality of soil is poor. Members have met and worshipped under a tree and only recently built the walls of a Church by making their own bricks. Unfortunately, they cannot afford to purchase the roofing and the unsupported church structure is in danger of damage from the elements... a common story across the region. A nursery is held within the church building space using a tarpaulin as shelter.

Mugango is keen to complete its' church building and make better use of its' considerable plot of land. It just needs the resources to do so. They also have a number of disabled persons and would like to receive the seed-grants for people with disability that have been provided elsewhere in the area.

It was a privilege to be given lunch, provided by the local community, in the hut of the local Pastor.



Mugango Church, near Lake Victoria.



Mission Director Ibrahim with Pastor's wife.

Ministry with people with Disabilities.

I have previously reported on the remarkable ministry being undertaken by the Methodist Church in Tanzania amongst people with disabilities. Rev. Peter Andrew has devoted his life to reaching people with disability in rural areas, changing attitudes to disability and trying to enable those with disability to regain purpose, confidence and dignity through being able to work. MCB has supported seed grants to people with disabilities to start businesses to help them become self-sufficient. The lives of many have thus been transformed.

During this visit, I was invited to meet others who have benefited from this ministry in a region which I had not previously visited. The following are some of the beneficiaries of this work:

Esther was married in 1993. Of the 5 children that she has given birth to, 4 are disabled with an inherited condition and two have died at the age of 20. She has one healthy son. Each of her disabled children developed the condition when under 2 years old. In 2005, Esther's husband left her with the 5 children and without any support, believing that she was cursed. Subsequently, he tried to sell the home in which they lived, potentially leaving the whole

family homeless, but the Courts stepped in and allowed Esther and her children to live in part of the property while the remaining part is rented out, the income from which goes to her husband. Esther has had to manage with the support of family as she has been marginalised by the community and also by some members of the family. Even her sister believed it would be bad luck if her children mixed with their cousins. Since the Church started supporting Esther, her life has changed. A seed-grant has enabled to start a small stall selling charcoal, bananas and maize, which is supporting her and her family. This has also provided her with dignity and attitudes of those around her are also changing towards her and her children.

Jennifer has four children: Paul,15; Nyabara, 13; Stephen John 11; Lucia,8. Her husband died of a brain tumour when Lucia was just one month old leaving Jennifer to look after four children and try to make a living by selling firewood. Whilst trying to leave a political demonstration at a market (in which she was not involved), Jennifer was shot by a stray bullet, fired into the crowd by police and ended up having several operations in hospital to put her shoulder together. She still has limited movement in one arm. Jennifer's husband was a farmer who owned several plots of land but his family took the land and removed her. Eventually,with the help of the local church, she managed to rent a small property and has bought a small piece of land on which she hopes to build a small dwelling. A seed-grant has enabled her to set up a vegetable stall which is providing a living and giving her a small amount of savings. Jennifer works all hours to provide for her family and to save so in order to become independent and build her own home.



Esther with Godfrey and Neema.



Jennifer at her stall, provided by a seed grant.

Daniel is a third son whose father died when he was 7 years old and fell ill with Tuberculosis when he was 12 years old, leaving him disabled. In order to earn a living, he learned how to mend and repair things and a seed grant has enabled him to set up a repair stall in his village. He has also been able to purchase tools and this has increased his income capacity. He has been able to build his own small home and become more independent. His ambition is to be able to open a shop to sell items and to have some sort of transport since he has to pay twice a day to go to and from his home 3kms from his stall.

Pastor Laoleti John is married with 6 children, but 6 years ago had a major accident which shattered his leg. He was out of work for many months and has had to limit his ministry that

brings in very little income. A seed-grant has enabled his wife to set up a stall to sell charcoal, sugar-cane, firewood and vegetables in order to support themselves.



Daniel.



Pastor John.

This ministry to People with Disabilities has been truly transformative for many individuals and communities in various parts of North Western Tanzania. There is a widespread need to expand this ministry, but the MCT lacks the resources. The MCT sees income-generating initiatives as a major priority now in order to enable self-sustainability and the continuation of ministries across the region.

Summary of priorities for Methodist Church in Tanzania

- Income-generation initiatives to enable self-sustainability.
- Training of Ministers and Lay People.
- Support for Ministry with people with disability.
- Mission Partner to assist in Training in Church and Community Development?
- Training for girls, women and rural communities to address issues of Gender violence and FGM.

Visit to Uganda 21st – 26th September 2023

The Methodist Church in Uganda (MCU) began as a Bible study group in the 1980s and has grown to over 35 congregations situated predominantly in rural areas in the east of the country. MCU is an officially registered Church in Uganda (1986) and a fully-fledged Synod with 7 Circuits manned by 7 ministers and 35 local Church pastors, all under the Methodist Church Kenya (MCK) Conference. MCU became a full Synod in 2016/17 with a sitting Bishop from Kenya who led the Church until 2021. A Ugandan Bishop, Rev. Ntoghnya was elected in 2022 and installed in 2023. The Office was re-established in Jinja.

For 35 years the church has been empowering congregations holistically, implementing initiatives at congregational, circuit and synod levels as well as empowering communities to share the love of God through its' charitable and voluntary services. A newly developed strategic plan is focussed on scriptural holiness, evangelism, discipleship, godly leadership, stewardship and community service.

The Methodist Church in Uganda has grown in predominantly rural areas where educational infrastructure is poor. The Church's strategic mission entails both the building of schools in rural areas and the building of boarding accommodation to enable marginalised children from even more remote areas to access educational infrastructure.

In August, 2023, the Methodist Church Uganda received Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris-Chapman as Mission Partners.

Meeting at Synod Office.

It was a joy to spend time during this visit with:

Bishop David Ntogohnya and his wife.

Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris-Chapman.

Rev. Richard Kyaira, Synod Secretary.

Rev. Jonathan Mujoma. Superintendent of Irundu Circuit.

Rev. Mugenda Wala Hamis. Superintendent Minister, Iganga.

Rev. Nathan Weboya Superintendent Minister, Kamuli Circuit.

Members and leaders of the Women's Fellowship.

Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris-Chapman.

Daniel and Grace arrived in Uganda in August 2023 and are already having a profound impact through their presence and ministry.

Most Ugandan Methodist members are under the age of 30 and church worship is dynamic. It is also deeply influenced by Ugandan Pentecostalism and has suffered from a lack of training in Methodist tradition and structures. This is affecting the sense of identity and unity within the Church with many churches and ministers tending to 'do their own thing' but not knowing anything different. Daniel has managed to translate the Methodist Standing Orders into Luganda, the local language and is undertaking a far-reaching process of training local churches and ministers in Methodist ways and structures. He is trying to provide the tools for the local Church to discern an authentic Ugandan Methodist presence within the country, stressing each community's place within the structures of the Methodist Synod, Connexion and global family. Until now, this concept has been barely understood.

Daniel is also assisting the Synod Office in establishing robust governance and financial structures that will provide a firm foundation for many years and for the development of the Methodist Church in the country.

Meanwhile, Grace is teaching, training, and supporting the Women’s Fellowship. Both Daniel and Grace are deeply appreciated in Uganda and their presence and ministry is a wonderful example of the ways in which the British Church can have a deeply constructive presence and fellowship with its partner Churches.



Daniel and Grace overlooking the River Nile at Jinja.

Visit to Irundu Circuit. (3 hours north of Jinja).

It was a privilege to spend a day visiting isolated village churches in the Irundu Circuit north of Jinja – a Circuit typical of the Methodist Church communities served by the Methodist Church in Uganda. The area is reached along 3 hours of mostly unmade roads and tracks.

At Ikunda we met with village members to talk about their life and work, in a hut owned by the Methodist Church. The members are currently building a new church, having made the bricks themselves and built the walls to roof level. As in villages across Africa, roofing the Church is the major challenge, since roofing timbers and tin roof panels are expensive and beyond the financial reach of most rural communities.



Ikunda Village.

At Nambula, we visited a Primary School which parents and staff had themselves built using local materials. The school has 600 pre-school and Primary children on roll and 17 staff. It is

situated in the centre of a wide rural geographical area with children attending from distant villages. There is a desperate need for boarding facilities which will also bring an income. The school has partnered with a charity called ‘Compassion’ which provides, spiritual, social, health care, and training in cognitive skills to the children.



Nambula Primary School

At Buyumba, we were greeted by Church members. There are 80 church members and about 170 children and 6 teachers in the Methodist school which consists of several simple wood and straw classroom structures. With members all being farmers, the Church struggles to find the resources to fund and grow its’ ministry and maintain the church and school buildings.



Buyumba Primary School



Buyumba Church.



Buyumba School Classroom.

In Irundu we met with members of the Methodist Church Council in their small church compound. Here they have 40 adult members and 73 children who worship under a tree since the tiny mud church is too small to accommodate them. They do however have a large plot of land which they hope to develop and on which they hope to build a church.



Irundu Methodist Church and congregation.

A very notable feature of the rural landscape in Uganda – a feature that is increasingly being established in rural areas across Africa – is the building of substantially built mosques and Muslim schools with funds from Saudi Arabia and Turkey – in almost every village. Boreholes and free education are also being provided and are so attracting Muslim converts in rural areas. This is clearly a deliberate strategy that is being spread out across Africa. It is obvious Churches cannot compete. Well-built, brick and tiled mosques are being constructed everywhere, whilst most Christian denominations cannot even afford to put tin rooves on their simple mud-brick constructions. It is almost inevitable that the religious demographic is likely to shift significantly in the coming years if our vulnerable church partners do not have the resources to strengthen their presence.



Village mosques in Irundu circuit.

On Sunday, I preached at Kibudaire Methodist Church in Bugandada Circuit – another rural church. It was a lively service clearly influenced by Ugandan Pentecostalism and bearing little resemblance to a normal Methodist service.



Key points from meeting at the Methodist Church Uganda Synod Office:

- Need for more autonomy and financial independence from Kenya.
- Need to establish a clear Ugandan Methodist Identity and train ministers and members in Methodist traditions and structures whilst making them relevant to local context.
- Need for strengthening and expanding numbers of local leadership.
- Strengthening Ministers’ welfare.
- Increased training for Ministers and Local Pastors.
- Need to prioritise income-generating initiatives in order to enhance self-sustainability and support growth and development.
- More time needed for Daniel and Grace to support the local Church beyond August 2024.

- The Synod Office now has robust governance and financial procedures in place that offer transparency and accountability. The uncertainties of recent times are in the past.
- Concern at the rapid increase of Muslim presence through the building of mosques and schools in almost every village.

Visit to Equatorial Guinea **26th September – 1st October 2023**

The history of the Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea began with the arrival of the British on the Island of Fernando Po (occupied by the Spanish in 1778) and now known as Bioko, when a British Naval Base was established at Fernando Po to combat the slave trade. The island became a thriving place of asylum for freed slaves in the nineteenth century. The Primitive Methodists established a Mission at Malabo but by 1858 the Spanish expelled Protestant missionaries from the island. In April 1869, the English Consul and a clergyman of the Protestant Mission asked the Governor to allow them to freely exercise their religion in the city. As a result, the Methodist Church was established in Bioko with the financial support of the Methodist Church in Britain.



Catholic Church, Malabo.



Spanish landing site. 1778,

In September 1870, the Methodists opened a school for boys and another for girls. There was a strained relationship in the early days with the Spanish government with attempts to lessen the impact of the school.

In 1973, the Methodist Church combined with the Crusade Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea to establish the Methodist Church of Equatorial Guinea. Today Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa. It is the second oldest Methodist Conference in Africa but it is the smallest in size.

The main church on the island is in Malabo on the original plot of land purchased by the British where the first British Methodist Church and School were built in 1870 by the Primitive Methodists. The Church has two Mission outstations on the island: at Baloeri, the oldest Methodist Church on the island, and at Luba, on the south of the Island, both visited during the course of this visit. There are only four Ministers serving the Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea and there are two more Ministers in training. Ministers have to travel to Nigeria to attend Theological Seminary.



Methodist Church, Malabo.



Malabo Methodist School.

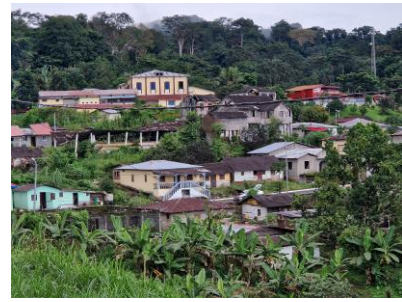
Baleori Mission.

The historic Mission at Baleori, about 20 miles west of Malabo was established at the end of the 19th Century and represents the birthplace of Methodism in Equatorial Guinea. Lack of resources and people have meant that some of the older buildings, including a former school and manse have become ruins, but the Church has recently been restored. The Church is situated on a good-sized plot of land but access is only by poor tracks through a village that are often difficult to pass in the rainy season. The Church has about 25 members who still have Men's and Women's Fellowships and weekly prayer meetings and bible study. The Church does not have electricity which means they need a generator which is extremely expensive both to purchase and run. The Minister travels from Malabo to serve the community as there is no Manse available.



Luba Mission

The Methodist Church at Luba is situated over 60kms from Malabo on the south of the Island. It was built in the 19th Century and is spiritual home to a lively congregation of about 100 members. They have an active Women's and Men's Fellowship, regular Youth Service, Bible Study and Worship Services. Unfortunately, since there is no Manse, the Minister lives in Malabo and has to travel to Lube which can take up to two hours on the bus. Transport is limited. The roof of the church is leaking and needs replacing. Members are trying to raise the funds to replace it. Maintenance of the old Church building is a constant struggle, but the members continue to have evangelism as a priority for the local village communities that the church serves. Raising funds are a constant strain and a vegetable garden has been established in the Church grounds to try and raise some funds as well as improve food security.



Meeting at Methodist Church in Malabo.

It was a privilege to meet with leaders and members of the Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea at the Methodist Church in Malabo. The Church has about 250 members of whom 105 are active. It has a busy weekly programme of Women's and Men's Fellowship meetings, Worship and Bible Study meetings, Youth Fellowship gathering and services.

The school, adjacent to the Church is the original school that was built in 1870. Grants from the Methodist Church in Britain have helped to expand and improve the school facilities to serve the 700 pupils. The in-take is growing and this is seen as a key mission of the Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea.

Key issues/challenges identified by members of the Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea.

- Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea has very limited resources, both in people and funds.
- As the only Spanish-speaking Church in Africa and with limited and very expensive transport connections to the rest of Africa, it is fairly isolated compared to other African partners.
- Training of Ministers can only be undertaken by sending them to Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa. The Church does not have the resources to do this without support. A need for some sort of training within Equatorial Guinea.
- Might there be the possibility of increasing online training opportunities?
- Desire to increase income-generation activities to strengthen self-sustainability. The Church is very keen to undertake a visit to neighbouring Cameroon where the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon has many extremely successful examples of income-generating activities.
- Would value some input from other Connexions in Africa in how to develop food-security projects in the rural communities.
- A desperate need for the local churches to have Methodist hymnbooks in Spanish. Currently using old English hymnbooks when most members can't even speak English!
- Lack of musical resource and musical instruments means that younger people are being attracted to the Pentecostal churches. A real need therefore to purchase more musical instruments for the churches and a desire to have a placement of a Spanish

musicologist to help the Church develop its' own indigenous Methodist musical tradition.

- Methodist Church in Equatorial Guinea would highly value a friendship/relationship with a Spanish-speaking Church in Central America to be able to discuss common issues and challenges and learn from how fellow Spanish churches have sought to address them.
- Needs guidance in establishing a robust Accounting System.
- Would like to have more cross-connexional contact across Africa.

Summary.

Once again, this intensive visit to five countries in three weeks has highlighted the importance of personal relationships and the value that our African partners place upon the relationship between themselves and MCB.

There is recognition of the changing dynamics of the relationship given the substantially reduced financial resources that MCB will have for grant purposes in the future. However, there is a keen desire to ensure that our mutual relationship continues to be strengthened and, that we might discern other ways in which as a global Church we can support one another. For together, we can learn how to most effectively offer a Methodist presence serving God's people in a changing, complex and challenging global environment.



Revd. Dr. Andrew Ashdown
Partnership Coordinator for Africa.
20 October 2023.