

## Partnership visit to Methodist Church Sierra Leone 10 – 20 January 2019

**1.0 Aims:** To meet with the newly elected MCSL leaders -Presiding Bishop , Admin Bishop Lay Leader  
To evaluate strategic strengthening exercise conducted by All We Can  
To update MCSL on ongoing changes at MC Britain

### 2.0 Meeting at the MCSL Connexional Office, Freetown Sierra Leone

I departed from London Heathrow airport on a mild winter evening via Casablanca, and arrived at Lungi airport, Sierra Leone at 1.45am. Passage through security was swift at that time of the morning and I was grateful that my luggage also arrived despite the short transitional time in Morocco. Thankfully, there was a MCSL member waiting for me and he assisted me with my ferry arrangement to Freetown. We were the only two on the ferry to Sovereign from the airport, all the others travelled to ferry to Aberdeen Sierra Leone. As we disembarked, it was humbling to see Ali, MCSL driver waiting to take me to my guesthouse at an untoward time of the morning. At 3.45am, I arrived at my guesthouse, checked in and went straight to bed.

Later that morning, I met with MCSL Connexional Staff team members and I got my visit itinerary as well as listened to ongoing issues affecting the Conference at the meeting held at 4 George St, Freetown on 11 January 2019:



MCSL leaders – Education Secretary, Lay leader and Presiding Bishop at MCSL HQ

### 2.1 Background information on the AWC-MCSL-MCB project

1. The tripartite partnership between All We Can, MCB and MCSL commenced in February 2017. All We Can appointed Prof Ogara as the Consultant to initiate the MCSL's capacity building programme. The aim was to assist MCSL in reviewing and strengthening its structure to become more effective and efficient. The first phase of the programme was explorative (2017), the second phase was consultative (2017-18) and the third phase is the implementation phase (2018-19)
  2. Prof Ogara conducted an interactive organisational development assessment of MCSL. Unfortunately, during the course of this project, he was bereaved twice (loss of mother and wife), delaying the planned schedule. Nevertheless, Prof Ogara submitted a comprehensive assessment in summer of 2018 after which MCSL agreed its 3-year strategic plan in July 2018 at its Biennial Conference.
  3. Rev Mark Ngobeh was unanimously elected as the Presiding Bishop of MCSL, Rev Ronald Bobb-Williams re-elected as MCSL Administrative Bishop and Mrs Ade-Williams elected as the Lay President.
  4. Following consultation with partners, MCSL developed a budget for its first year of implementation (2018-2019) AWC – 20%, CC – 16%, Other Partners – 3%, MCSL – 7.7%, WCR – 52.7%
  5. The implementation phase started in September 2018 until August 2019; MCSL shall focus on its six pillars summarised as - (i) Evangelisation (ii) Uphold Methodist identity (iii) Promote leadership training (iv) Encourage community empowerment (v) Secure important investments (vi) Have sustainable finance plans
- MCSL will submit a mid-term report about its implementation phase progress to all stakeholders by February 2019.

### 3.0 Visit to Sydney Groves Memorial Church, Kenema

The next day it was an early departure to Kenema via Bo. We briefly stopped at St Augustine Church in Bo to extend greetings with Synod members at 11am – 12 noon. We travelled by road to Kenema for about an hour to meet with representatives of societies, circuits and Methodist institutions, about twenty attended the meeting held at Sydney Groves Memorial Church, Kenema from 1.50pm to 3.15pm. We sang a few choruses and prayed at the start. Francis Musa, MCSL Dev Sec, thanked the people for attending the meeting and reminded them of the ongoing MCSL strategic plan being implemented. Bishop Ngobeh shared ongoing challenges faced by the Connexional Team with no assessments paid by the districts. As a result, Connexional staff had received no salary in the past nine months. Member were encouraged to comment or offer suggestions: Summary of discussions:

1. Suggested income generating ideas from existing circuit and conference properties e.g. complete unfinished manse and let out
2. They enquired from the Bishop if there were other income generation plans apart from assessments
3. They accepted the need to seek project funds at various MCSL levels
4. They suggested having grievance and disciplinary procedures for misbehaving ministers and members
5. They commented on the importance of transparency and accountability to earn trust
6. They asked for policy and procedure to respond to impending challenges e.g. fixing a leaking roof quickly



Bunmi, Rev Ngobeh, Segbwema Paramount Chief and Rev Bobb Williams at MC Segbwema

I thanked everyone for coming and commended the visible renovations at the church e.g. the new wall perimeter, updating the church hall plus maintaining the church manse on the premises.

During discussions, the Bishops explained that the purpose of MCSL Connexional staff was to implement the wishes of the conference. The MCSL Conference office aims to complement and not compete with the districts, circuits and societies. Therefore, we have noted their comments and MCSL leaders will feedback soon. Bishop Ngobeh, Francis Musa and myself later visited both Methodist Primary and Secondary Schools at

Bo before proceeding to Segbwema, which was two-hours' drive further by road.

### 3.1 Visit to the Nixon Memorial Methodist Hospital (NMMH) and MC Segbwema Circuit

The meeting started at 6.30pm – 8.00pm at Nixon Methodist Hospital. Thirteen people (including me) were present. The Bishop thanked everyone for coming and prayed for a short and fruitful meeting. He explained that we had been to Bo and Kenema, and plan to worship with Segbwema circuit members at next day Sunday service held at MC Segbwema. Below is a summary of the discussions:

1. Since MCSL had received the business audit report from Prof Ogara, it formulated a strategic plan that offers a road map for its activities. One of which was to review its constitution to enable it solve contemporary issues e.g ongoing communication challenges between Nixon Methodist Hospital (located over five hours by road) and MCSL HQ in Freetown
2. The Admin Bishop, Ronald Bobb-Williams, arrived in Segbwema on Thursday 10 January with his team to investigate the two weeks strike by Nixon Memorial Methodist Hospital Support staff. NMMH staff had received no salaries for six months and the government subvention to Nixon Methodist hospital stopped when the new regime took office in 2018. MCSL leaders thanked God for answered prayers, as few Methodists in Freetown were able to pull strings to influence the government to pay the outstanding wages up till January 2019. Nevertheless, the investigation team met with NMMH staff and plan to submit recommendations for its long-term sustainability. The report will be submitted by February 2019 and all stakeholders updated about the situation.
3. NMMH regularly has insufficient revenue to pay staff wages, purchase drugs, attract competent personnel, treat malnourished kids etc. In addition to these, it was reported that the water reservoir was dangerously low because it was dry season (no rains) plus ongoing use by the community. These issues have made



NMMH income generating project – Manufactured and sold of pure water sachets

NMMH is heavily donor dependent especially on the Friends of Nixon (FoN) that has supported various projects such as water purification project, solar power project, drug purchase, canteen services, cinema hall for global football screening and several fundraising activities. Nevertheless, MCSL has to consider its long-term sustainability to avoid repeated strike that affects the hospital reputation.

4. NMMH Nursing School has its Community Health Nursing Course ending in 2019 and a higher course is to replace it. However, the college currently has insufficient qualified nurse tutors to run the new course and has to consider what next?

### 3.2. Visit to Bo District

1. We visited the Youth Centre and Computer suite full of obsolete computer machines. The management

committee is yet to send a report to MCSL Connexional leaders with suggestions on how to upgrade and then optimise the resource.

2. The Presiding Bishop, Admin Bishop, Development Secretary and I, then visited the crèche. It had 180 pupils in four classes within two rooms. The children were well behaved and in new school uniforms at the start of the year. There were three class teachers plus one volunteer (that receives no wages) despite assisting for more than ten years. The teachers were amazing.



MC circuit leaders at the Bo District meeting

3. The Methodist primary school was on the same premises and had three classes. The pupils were on break during our visit and the few we met in the classes happily recited the national pledge to us.
4. Across the road was the Methodist Secondary School campus that has two shifts. The Junior Secondary School operated from 8.00am -1.00pm with 1,360 students and the Senior Secondary School operated from 1.30pm - 5.30pm with 1,400 students. Teachers were in school from 7.30am – 6.30pm. The school has a very good academic reputation in the country, with more than seven distinctions in 2018. Both junior and senior schools also won several sports awards.
5. We travelled to the other end of Bo town to visit a thriving ‘girls only’ Methodist School in the locality. It was yet to be approved by the government but has consistently had great academic results. The school has obtained necessary documents for government approval. The good news is that the government still pays the teachers.

### 3.3 Visit to Freetown District

The Freetown District meeting was held at Zion Methodist Church, Wesley Street, Freetown at 10.30am on 16 January 2019. The turnout was encouraging, with more than thirty people in attendance. Rev Mark Ngobeh started the meeting sharing his vision of promoting unity among Methodists as members were segregated when he took up office. He believed that a unified church pursuing the six pillars of the strategic plan together should place MCSL in good stead. Our visits to the various districts was to strengthen Connexionalism, improve communication and listen to the concerns of its parishioners. I thanked everyone for my warm reception and commended the progress and commitment by Western District members. Nevertheless, this meeting offered an opportunity to recognise and further strengthen the Connexion. Below is a summary of issues raised at the meeting:

- 1) Missing circuit leaders – Many of those in attendance were retirees and committed leaders. However it was noted there were some ministers that frequently missed meetings and were poor performers.
- 2) Recruitment of ministers – MCSL was encouraged to review its recruitment process to attract passionate student ministers with a heart for God’s kingdom



First year students at Methodist Boys High School, Kissy Freetown

- 3) Refresher course for ministers – Regular updates on church legal issues and care for parishioners were in the pipeline.
- 4) There was a good mixture of laity and clergy in leadership in addition to good representation of all ages. Regular updates on roles and responsibilities of leaders would be helpful
- 5) MCSL is to review its disciplinary procedure for ministers, lay leaders and members to promote good practise
- 6) Youths– Enhance youth participation by scheduling meetings at a suitable times and venues. MCSL should release greater control for youths to govern their own affairs and interested youths could be

mentored by retired professionals

- 7) The District plans to open its District office soon at Zion Methodist Church. A floor has been allocated to the District office, and another floor for the Circuit office. The first floor was to be used as ‘Events Hall’ for conferences, meetings etc. to generate rental income. A cafeteria was also available on site.
- 8) Prayer and counselling rooms were also provided for prayers, counselling (including career counselling)
- 9) Western Districts had various church growth initiatives and income generation ideas to share with the other two districts and work closely with MCSL Connexional team

### 3.5 MBH School visit and housing scheme around Freetown

We visited the Methodist Boys High School, Kissy; a very popular and highly reputable school ‘boys only’ school in the community. The junior secondary school has 1,360 boys and the senior secondary school has 1,807. The school was known for its academic excellence and engagement in several other activities. MCSL leaders seek ongoing connection with this school, to continue to uphold Methodist identity and ethics. Also to twin with other Methodist Schools home and away. After viewing few classrooms, and interacting with the senior students, we left for REMISH.



REMISH Housing scheme for retired MCSL ministers – only two built so far

REMISH is the housing scheme for retired MCSL ministers unable to afford their own accommodation after retirement. The ministers were encouraged to contribute to the scheme now, to supplement subsidised rates in future. Only two show houses have been built on the premises, with existing land space for six more bungalows. Each house was a two-bedroom building with living and dining rooms – it was a well designed habitation for senior citizens. However, the criteria for eligibility is being compiled.

### 3.6 Women's Centre, Richmond's Ground - Freetown

A meeting with MCSL Women Network and Women Fellowship took place on Wednesday 16 January 2019. It was such a pleasant surprise to see the new Women's Centre built using local women's contributions over the years. It was constructed within three years with no external funding. It was a joy to see the new building. I commended their achievement, and prayed for its progress in 2019 plus future years.



MCSL Lay President and Women's Fellowship Presidents at new centre

The President asked if MCB could help furnish few rooms for seminars and workshops to help widows, single mothers, and the unemployed lured into prostitution. These rooms were at the base of the building. She said it would also offer space for religious and social activities, both for church and community activities.

Women Network (the national officers), shared their own goals. A mission priority was targeting uneducated girls between the age of 18 – 35 for skills acquisition and literacy classes, particularly those in the provinces. Together with MCSL leaders, they wished to apply for a 'Gender Desk Officer' under the NMA scheme to help

co-ordinate youth and women's national and district affairs. The post holder would also link up with government parastatals on agribusiness, catering needs for Methodist Churches and individuals and promoting group mentoring in rural dwellings. It was an enriching experience and a privilege to have both Presiding and Admin Bishops in attendance praying and acknowledging the women's contributions to the Methodist Church.

### 4.0 WCR partnership issues recommendations:

#### 4.1 MCSL Training requests

Following my explanations on how the WCR Office offers training support to Africa partners under the SALT programme,

1. MCSL is to submit applications for postgraduate studies to fill existing gaps at the Theological College, Freetown. I informed MCSL leaders that WCR could not guarantee sending a mission partner to Sierra Leone in the near future (even though a recent MP placement with MCSL was unsuccessful)
2. At the meeting held at the Theological College on Wednesday 16 January 2019, the lecturers said the college was capable of training of youths in church activities such as worship leaders, lay preachers and evangelists. MCSL could liaise with it for group training.
3. Lecturers at the Theological College, Freetown suggested training Sunday school leaders and offer refresher courses for MCSL ministers, alongside Cliff College lecturers. The group training could be in batches over two or three years.
4. MCSL specifically asked for training of circuit stewards on accountability and finance management

#### 4.2 MCSL Internet challenges

Computer illiteracy among ministers and poor communication were frequent comments made across the three districts

1. MCSL was still grappling with poor internet connection at its Connexional Office, despite its recent installation. I advised submitting a comprehensive report about the situation for review
2. I also visited the computer suite at Freetown Theological College, the Bo District computer suite plus another at Segbwema (which I could not visit). Many of the computers seen were obsolete (> 10 years old) and I was told that many MCSL ministers (especially those in the provinces) were still computer illiterate.
3. MCSL needs to develop a scheme over two or three years to upskill its ministers using the new District Offices at the various locations as learning hubs. Digital exposure should be regular and accessible to build their confidence. A reoccurring challenge has been that the 'old donated desktops' cannot process current apps and systems, thereby impeding MCSL communication with internal and external partners.



**Computers with 2004 software at Bo Church Centre**



**Older computers at the Theological College computer suite, Freetown**

#### 4.3 MCSL's unexpected container challenge

1. A container of medical goods, books, consumables, musical instruments, computers and miscellaneous items, worth £5,994 from MMS Ireland left Ireland probably November 2018 and recently arrived at Sierra Leone port for MCSL. As at 18/1/19 during my visit, the consignment has not been cleared because MCSL was charged Le 65m since it could not re-register its NGO status
2. The consignment contains five laptops and fifty computers at £1,375. Since the conditions, capabilities, models of these machines are unknown, it might be difficult for MCSL to develop a cohesive communication strategy across the districts. A phased strategy might be appropriate after auditing the donated machines
3. MCSL is very grateful for these gifts, however it might have to purchase few new computers in Sierra Leone to handle recent computer software packages. Another issue to consider is safe disposal obsolete computers
4. There were many useful and much needed medical equipment and consumables listed in the container. In future, alternative plans might be considered e.g. the possibilities of purchasing such items in country?
5. The port authority has also asked for US\$20,000 per day until the container was removed

I wish to thank MMSI for its wonderful generosity and ongoing support to MCSL. The perception of Sierra Leone Port Authority is that it considers 'churches' as institutions with rich partners, hence the high fees (such as the international NGOs).

#### 4.4 MCSL Personnel issues

It was good to meet with Bishop Ngobeh formally since becoming the Presiding Bishop in July 2017. He shared the challenge of MCSL Connexional staff receiving no salary for nine months. He inherited a situation exacerbated during the Ebola crisis and death of Rev Albert Beah. Below were suggestions raised during the meeting with MCSL leaders on Thursday 17 January 2019:

- (i) Investigation has started by few concerned Methodists (with related professional abilities) to assess MCSL's current wage liability with the hope of negotiating a win-win situation for employees and employer.
- (ii) Devolve to District offices – The Western District might be able to work with MCSL headquarters on this, particularly regarding certain posts
- (iii) Submit applications for new mission initiatives under the national in Mission Appointment programme
- (iv) MCSL aims to streamline its current personnel needs to align with its new strategic direction. It should explore part-time working, shared personnel and volunteering.

MCSL is also grappling with Nixon Methodist Hospital wage burden and welcomed government's subvention in January 2019

- (v) MCSL members negotiated a payment of Le 330m for staff salary to clear backlog
- (vi) MCSL intends to declare its inability to continue to pay Nixon Hospital Staff to Friends of Nixon, and explore various options available

#### 4.5 Investment plans

1. In view of the various challenges facing MCSL, having several investment plans for income generation has become imperative. MCSL should submit few business plans to me with potentially profitable ventures for MCB soft loan consideration. I hope that this would kick-start MCSL's sustainability and strengthen the Connexion.

2. Each MCSL district is also developing self-funded investment plans or seek private-public funding alternatives

MCSL shall liaise directly with all stakeholders mentioned in this report.

Thank you

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