

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF
THE MISSIONARY CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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The Missionary Church, with headquarters in Fort Wayne, Indiana, was founded at the end of the last century with the purpose in mind of taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people of other lands. Although the present denomination did not come into being until 1969, the two groups that merged at that time--the Missionary Church Association and the United Missionary Church--had always felt keenly the responsibility of believers to carry out the command of Christ as set forth in the Great Commission.

With this purpose in view, the denomination has sent missionaries to many countries of the world. Many of the early volunteers gave their lives in carrying out the task, some of them within a few months of arriving on the field.

The people in the home churches stood behind these workers in prayer and exceptional giving. At peak periods of missionary activity, the church had one missionary overseas for every one hundred members on its roll.

An example of the work done by the denomination is that which has been established in Nigeria. Opened in 1905 by Rev. and Mrs. A.W. Banfield, the work moved rather slowly until 1945. From then on an upsurge came quickly, not only in increased personnel but also in the development of the indigenous church. Within ten years, the Missionary Church in Nigeria had been organized and registered with the government. Within that period also, three Bible schools had been organized as well as an eighty-bed hospital, a Nurses' Training School, numerous primary schools, a Teacher Training School and Technical School, a large Bible Correspondence School and the foundation of a Theological College which has since trained scores of young people from all parts of Nigeria for the Christian ministry.

In 1955, over sixty missionaries were working with the Nigerian church. Twenty years later, national leaders were operating all programs which had been set up by the mission, and the handful of missionaries still in the country were engaged in assisting in leadership training and evangelism.

Although the denomination is small (27,000 members), the Missionary Church has had a unique ministry in ten countries of the world and continues to carry out the purpose for which it was founded.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
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Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century a spiritual awakening swept over much of North America spawning many new groups and denominations. Many of these were formed because a number of established churches disowned their sons and daughters who had been vitalized by evangelical teaching.

This was the situation which led to the founding of two groups which later merged to become The Missionary Church in North America. One of these groups, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ denomination (which adopted the name, "The United Missionary Church" in 1947) was founded in 1883 when the Mennonite conference in Indiana, Ohio and Ontario excommunicated some of its leaders who had come into a conversion experience.

In Indiana, the Missionary Church Association was organized in 1898 after a prominent evangelist in the Defenseless Mennonite Church, Rev. Joseph Eicher Ramseyer, was excluded from its membership. In the opinion of the bishops he had been teaching doctrines that seemed much too radical for the church at that time. These two denominations, after close associations for many years, merged in March, 1969, to form THE MISSIONARY CHURCH.

It is with the missionary program of this

denomination that this paper is concerned.

Right from the time of their inception, both arms of the church have had a deep sense of responsibility for the salvation of the lost, both at home and in other lands. In a day when many denominations were averaging one missionary for every 5,000 members,¹ the Missionary Church people were sending out one overseas worker for every one hundred names on the roll.

It is the intention of the author of this thesis to outline in capsule form the formation of the early mission societies or sending agencies set up within these groups and then to give the account of the establishing of the indigenous church in Nigeria as an example of the type of work being done by the denomination in other countries of the world.

To avoid cumbersome and tedious repetitions, the forms "MCA," "UMC" and "C&MA" are sometimes used in place of the full names, "Missionary Church Association," "United Missionary Church" and "Christian and Missionary Alliance."

A major part of this paper is scheduled to become

¹In 1975 the Southern Baptist Convention listed 12.9 million members and 2,667 overseas missionaries. (Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas, 11th edition, Edward R. Dayton, editor; Monrovia, California: MARC, 1976, p. 319.)

one section of a book² which describes in detail the work done in ten countries of the world³ wherever a branch of the Missionary Church International has been established. Because it is the author's desire that many within the denomination will read this expanded account, a more readable, yet dignified, style of writing has been adopted which sets forth the main facts, yet speaks as well to the heart.

It is hoped that even the casual reader will readily recognize that the denomination, although small in membership, has done a significant work overseas as seen in the account of the establishment and development of The Missionary Church of Nigeria.

²Permission was kindly granted for this by Grace Theological Seminary in June, 1979.

³This project entailed four years of research by the author including a fact-finding tour to eight of these countries.

CHAPTER I

ESTABLISHING THE MISSION AGENCIES

Candidates, count the cost! Be prepared to live lives of privation, of toil, of loneliness, of danger; to be looked down upon by the people of your own country and by those to whom you minister; to live far removed from the comforts and advantages of a society and protection such as you have enjoyed at home Trust God to be able to sustain you in sickness as well as in health If you are faithful servants, you will find in Christ and in God's . . . fullness, a preciousness, a peace, a joy, strength and blessing that will far outweigh all you may sacrifice for Him.⁴

This was the challenge given to the pioneers that went out from The Missionary Church in the early years of its ministry. Well they needed to heed it, for during the first twenty-five years of foreign missionary work, the missions report of the Missionary Church Association must have sounded like a disaster victims' list:

Ernest Biber: Congo, sailed 1898; died 1898, black water fever.

Henry Zehr: China, sailed 1902; died 1904, smallpox.

Kathryn Burkey: China, 1903; died 1904, smallpox.

Lydia Burkey (sister): China, 1903; died 1904, smallpox.

Nellie Bowen: China, 1910; died 1914.

Mrs. Charles Roberts: China, 1916; died 1919, pneumonia.

Oswald Dinham: India, 1917; shipwrecked twice before arrival; died 1919, consumption.

Nancy Ramseier: India, 1923; died 1924.

⁴Henry Zehr, "A Missionary Narrative," The Missionary Worker, 1:1 (September, 1904), p.6.

Another report could pass for a citation of honor:

Eliza von Gunten: China, 1891; 35 years of service.
 Elizabeth Hilty: China, 1905-1937; "the Mary Slessor
 of China."
 David C. Rupp, Sr.: Sierra Leone, 1907; 50 years of
 service.
 Helen Goosen: Kenya, 1914; one furlough in 37 years.
 Agnes Sprunger: Congo, 1916; no furlough for over 12
 years.
 Mary DeGarmo: China, 1919; 2 furloughs in 28 years;
 robbed several times of all possessions
 by plundering armies; killed 1947.
 Elda Amstutz: India, 1927; interned four years by
 Japanese.⁵

A similar list could be compiled of United Mission-
 ary Church workers:

Eusebius Hershy: Liberia, sailed 1890; died 1890, malaria.
 Dr. Elizabeth Mauer: Turkey, 1904; died 1908, typhoid.
 Rev. Henry Mauer: Turkey, 1906; died 1909, assassinated.
 Adeline Brunk: Turkey, 1906; died 1906, typhoid.
 Emma Hostetler: Nigeria, 1907; died 1912, smallpox.
 William Finlay: Nigeria, 1918; died 1924, yellow fever.
 Joseph Ummel: Nigeria, 1922; died 1943, tropical fever.
 Elgin Brubacher: Nigeria, 1939; died 1943, tropical fever.

Is one tempted to ask, "Why this waste?"

Perhaps it took the indelible imprint of these early
 tragedies to stamp upon the two denominations that character
 of sacrifice and unselfish dedication that has held the
 church to its original purpose--the carrying out of the
 Great Commission throughout the world.

A Missionary Goal

Both denominations came into being through the thrust

⁵Condensed from a list of deceased missionaries given
 by Walter H. Lugibihl and Jared F. Gerig, The Missionary
 Church Association (Berne, Indiana: Economy Printing Concern,
 1950), pp. 99-104.

of evangelistic-missionary vision. The very name chosen by the church indicates the central interest and first love of the men who founded it.

It is worthy of note that in keeping with . . . the name, the first conference which resulted in the organization of the Missionary Church Association, made provision for doing little else but missionary work. That seemed to be the great passion and burden for which they wanted organized existence.⁶

In the United Missionary Church, the very first conference of the original group passed as one of its first resolutions: "Resolved . . . that the missionary cause be supported to the extent of our ability."⁷

The two groups were similar in other ways as well. The first missionary to sail for Africa from both churches left in the 1890's. Both plunged into the work of winning souls. Both died within six months of reaching the field. Yet both had counted the cost and were willing to pay its price:

"Where can I best glorify my heavenly Father and do the most good for my fellowman?" wrote Eusebius Hershey in requesting the UMC to release him for work in Liberia although he was over sixty years of age.⁸

Ernest Biber of the MCA, after being warned of the dangers in the Congo, replied, "Africa is my home; to Africa

⁶Ibid. p. 31

⁷Original minutes of the United Mennonite Conference, March, 1875, p. 2.

⁸Everek R. Storms, What God Hath Wrought (Springfield, Ohio: The United Missionary Society, 1948), p. 15.

I must go if only to be buried there."⁹

This was the quality of commitment on which the two denominations founded their missionary program. It was because of this dedication that they dared to call themselves "MISSIONARY."

The MCA vision was largely the result of its early association with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. From speakers like A.B. Simpson and other great missionary statesmen convention crowds caught the vision of a world dying without Christ. It was only natural that this new denomination should choose to send its workers out under the C&MA rather than become a sending agency itself. The mission policy of the MCA from the beginning was a cooperative one. It selected and supported its missionaries but sent them to the field under the supervision of orthodox and sound missionary agencies which were already established in that part of the world. It was felt unwise and unnecessary to duplicate administration, to build mission stations and acquire mission property. This policy was followed until 1945.¹⁰

Development of the Program

In the early years missionary candidates always seemed ready to apply. By 1945 the MCA had forty-four on

⁹Lugibihl and Gerig, p.93.

¹⁰From the report of the Foreign Secretary, 1956, p.1.

the field and eighteen ready to send out. That year was also "the bright year" for the UMC, for in 1945 sixteen missionaries left for overseas work. By this time the MCA and UMC churches, though small in membership, had sent almost three hundred workers to the field. This meant that at high peaks of missionary activity, each denomination was supporting one missionary for approximately every one hundred members.

Following World War II, a change came in the MCA policy. There was the need to increase missionary stimulus and interest within the Association. In 1964 Foreign Secretary Clarence Birkey reported:

It was becoming increasingly difficult to get our candidates to the field through other societies who were overwhelmed with applicants since many former fields had been closed due to war conditions. In 1945 the MCA began to establish and supervise its own fields in foreign lands. A foreign department was set up and Rev. David F. Siemens became the first Foreign Secretary.

In 1945 the Dominican Republic was opened at Dajabon Responsibility was assumed for the Esmeraldas province in Ecuador. Sierra Leone was re-opened and in 1946 we began to establish a permanent and progressive work in the Hawaiian Islands. In 1949 the supervision of a district in Jamaica was taken over and in 1951 we entered Haiti to work on the frontier.

Having our own fields has proved to be a good policy. It has stimulated a revival of interest in missions. People are willing to give more sacrificially, and more candidates are volunteering for service.¹¹

This proved to be the turning point for the foreign missionary enterprise in the MCA. In 1965 Mr. Birkey

¹¹Missionary Worker, 60:2 (September, 1964), p. 12.

retired and Rev. Paul Erdel, former missionary to Ecuador, accepted the position. He took the church smoothly through merger in spite of the many administrative problems that such a move involved. When he and his family returned to Ecuador in 1973, Rev. Eugene Ponchot, missionary to Sierra Leone, was elected to the position and serves the denomination until the present. Through his initiative, programs such as MAC (Missionary Assistants Corps) have been set up which encourages young people to serve for six weeks during the summer on Missionary Church fields.

The number of short-term missionaries and men's work teams overseas have also increased under his guidance. Assisting him until 1947 was Rev. Ward M. Shantz, then Rev. William Gerig as Assistant Director. Eileen Lageer served as Administrative Assistant from 1976-1978.

The final administration of the overall program is not the responsibility of the director, however. According to Mr. Ponchot's report,

The division of Overseas Missions is administered by an eight-man divisional board elected by and from the General Board This divisional board which meets at least twice a year sets the policy and gives general direction to our overseas ministries. They also give approval to the various stages of candidate screening as well as final approval for overseas assignment. They approve all field budgets which are submitted annually from each of the overseas fields

The Director implements the decisions of the divisional board and gives general supervision to the missionary force and field administrators.¹²

¹²Emphasis, 9:13 (July, 1977), p.9.

In this way the local church members, through their elected representatives on the Overseas Board, control the policies and activities of their missionary work.

Development of Interest at Home

One group within the denomination that has had a vital part in promoting the program is the Women's Missionary Society. Begun as "sewing circles" in individual churches as early as 1892,¹³ the organization has developed to a remarkable degree in its promotion of missions both at home and abroad. Down through the years over four million dollars has been raised for the purpose of World Missions. The WMS has financed scores of projects. Not one field has been overlooked. Bible schools, dispensaries, a hospital, vehicles of all kinds, a radio studio, correspondence schools as well as missionary support have been underwritten by the women.¹⁴ They have had a significant part in promoting, providing for and praying for the missionary work overseas.

In 1952 the men of the denomination organized a Men's Missionary Fellowship with a two-fold purpose: to challenge men to be personal soul winners and to promote home missions in as significant a way as the women have

¹³Mrs. C.H. Wiederkehr, The History of the WMS (no publisher, no date), p. 9.

¹⁴Elisabeth Ditmer, "Women in Action," Emphasis, 1:17 (January, 1970), p. 2.

foreign missions.¹⁵ Within the last decade this distinction between the objectives of the WMS and the MMI has been erased and through work teams, short term service and generous giving the men have become increasingly involved in the work of missions overseas. The "Lost Battalion," as the laymen of the church have sometimes been called, have been sought out, organized and put into service as part of the best shock troops that the Missionary Church owns.

Increase in Membership and Giving

The Missionary Church, with 27,000 members in 360 churches in North America, is gaining more quickly in its overseas branches than it is at home. At the time of merger there were 165 organized and 137 unorganized church groups overseas. By 1977 this had increased to 278 and 242. In the same period of time the number of baptisms per year had more than doubled, bringing the overseas membership to 15,239.¹⁶

The yearly budget for World Missions is also climbing. In 1972 it hit the \$1 million mark for the first time, rising to \$2 million for 1980. Of this amount, approximately 77% goes to overseas ministries and 23% to administration and outreach at home.

¹⁵Everek R. Storms, History of the United Missionary Church (Elkhart, Indiana: Bethel Publishing Co., 1958), p. 192.

¹⁶Tabulated from the 1969 and 1977 reports of field chairmen from eight overseas countries.

Although it is a small denomination, the Missionary Church stands near the top in per capita giving to missions. This is because the pastors as the "field men" are vitally interested in raising the money. Each section of the congregation is involved: the Sunday school classes, the WMS, the youth through "Wheels for Missions," the children in their Cadets program and the men with their solid support in regular giving each week.

During a 1978 crisis when World Mission funds dropped dangerously low, a day of fasting and prayer was called. The special sacrifice offering which was taken the following Sunday brought in \$180,000. A record amount of \$400,000 was received for World Missions during that month, bringing the total giving to \$1 million for the first six months of 1978.

The MC denomination is still worthy of the name "MISSIONARY."

CHAPTER II

ESTABLISHING THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

The year is 1905; the place, the steaming jungle port of Harcourt at the mouth of the Niger River. A small British steamer is pushing out from shore. Slowly the muddy waters bulge and ripple before its prow as it turns and heads for the north. Past tangled mangrove swamps it moves, the damp, fungus smell offensive to the nostrils. Past areas of dense rain forest, then sandy shores where drowsy crocodiles bathe themselves in the sun. Past sleepy villages which once knew the terror of the sudden attack of slave-hungry raiders. The steamer was on its way to Shonga, a small Nupe town three hundred miles up the great Niger.

Two of the passengers on board were Rev. and Mrs. A.W. Banfield of Ontario, the United Missionary Church's first missionaries to Nigeria. On board also was a white-man's marvel; nothing less than a prefabricated bungalow, complete with water system and bathroom plumbing. Mr. Banfield was indeed a forward-looking man.

Four years earlier he had come to Nigeria with a group of pioneers under the Africa Industrial Mission¹⁷ among whom was Rev. Ebenezer Anthony, the first District

¹⁷This later became the Sudan Interior Mission.

Superintendent of the UMC, Michigan District. When the S.S. Kampali had deposited their goods on the bank at Lokoja, a bleak future faced the four men on the shore.

We did not know where we were going to sleep that night, for we could not speak to the people As soon as the boat had left us we knelt down under the tree and asked God to direct us in our new life and lead us to a place where we could put our goods and sleep for the night.¹⁸

Their first task was to learn the language and establish rapport with the people. Within two years, however, all four pioneers had fallen prey to tropical diseases and were either buried near Pategi or ordered to return home. All, that is, except Mr. Banfield, even though the captain on their ocean-going vessel had predicted that this "skinny little fellow" would be dead in six months. Had not twenty out of twenty-four consuls sent out by the British government been buried in this land? The "iron coffin" was the derogatory name given to the consulate at Lagos, and so it had proved to be for many who had ventured to settle there. Who would want to come to this land just to die?

A.W. Banfield's wiry body and determined spirit survived numerous bouts of malaria, however, and helped him succeed in almost everything he set out to do. In his first

¹⁸A.W. Banfield, Life Among the Nupe Tribe (Berlin, Ontario: H.S. Hallman, 1905), p. 45.

three years at Pategi he mastered the Nupe language and within ten more had reduced it to writing. By 1914 he had translated the whole Bible into Nupe and had prepared the manuscript for publication. But during that first term he had another project in mind. Shonga, a town farther up the river, was the place where he wished to open a work.

On his first furlough, Mr. Banfield recruited tirelessly. One candidate he most successfully convinced was a United Missionary Church City Mission worker in Ontario--Miss Althea Priest. She married him, and the year 1905 found them steaming up to Shonga to open their first station. Soon, to the wonder of the Nupes, their marvelous new house was up and they were ready for work.

Another "eccentric" idea Mr. Banfield had was to bring out a printing press to this land. The bedplate was so heavy that it took a whole week for twenty men to drag it two miles from the river through the fields and swamp to the station.¹⁹ Soon it was set up, and there on the banks of the Niger the click-clacking of the Niger Press Company could be heard rolling out Christian literature and printing the precious Nupe Bible Mr. Banfield had prepared. Only in recent years has this translation undergone

¹⁹Nigerians could transport heavy loads on their head (the Banfield's kitchen stove was carried up the hill to their Jebba home by one man) but carrying with arm strength alone was much more difficult for them.

a revision.

Mr. Banfield's combined honeymoon and deputation tour through four UMC districts proved fruitful in gaining other recruits besides his wife. Within two years of his return to the field, four more workers went out to join them. Three of them were ladies (Misses Overholt, Panna-becker and Hostetler), but one was a young man from Michigan, Rev. Ira W. Sherk. He had early been interested in foreign missions and had been moved when his District Superintendent, Rev. E. Anthony, had sailed for Nigeria. Then came the shocking news from the field: "One dead, two invalided home. A.W. Banfield alone on the field."²⁰ Was God asking him to take their place?

In 1907 he too sailed for Nigeria, and the next forty-three years found him visiting the villages, preaching the Word, caring for the sick and trekking through the African bushland. After 1915 he had the supervising of the whole Nigerian work as well.

Opening the Central Region

Flowing through the heart of this country was one of Africa's great rivers, the "Lordly Niger." For years geographers had puzzled over its course. They knew that it had its source in the hills of Guinea and Sierra Leone, but

²⁰Jasper A. Huffman, History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (New Carlisle, Ohio: Bethel Publishing Company, 1920), p. 189.

where was its mouth? Did it join the Nile in the east? Did it flow south to the Zambesi? Or did it move northward under the Sahara desert and empty unseen into the Mediterranean? No one knew. No outlet could be found on the West African coast.

Finally in the nineteenth century a Scottish explorer, Mungo Park, established its course as turning southward just after it entered Nigeria, but he paid for this knowledge with his life. In the treacherous rapids near the city of Busa, his native canoe capsized and the expedition ended in disaster.²¹

The Niger flowed on, having captured its captor.

Four hundred miles farther down, it approached the sea secretly, hiding its many streams among the roots of the mangrove swamps that covered the widespread delta. No one on the coast would have suspected that this was the mouth of the great Niger.

Halfway into Nigeria the river flowed through two narrow channels protected by rocky hills on the west and the great Juju Rock to the east. Here the railway town of Jebba had grown up. Here too the British proposed to build a bridge, the only one for the next half century to span the great river that flowed for three thousand miles in

²¹Dixon Denham et al., Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa (London: John Murray, 1826), p. 381.

freedom.

Always one to recognize an opportunity, Mr. Banfield trekked to the town of Jebba, procured a site on "Mission Hill" as it came to be called, and in 1910 built the first cement block house ever to be constructed in the country.²² Here he set up his headquarters. The next building to go up was a church, though a tropical storm blew it flat before it was finished.

That year Mr. Banfield sent home an urgent appeal:

WANTED:

TWO MEN FOR THE MBC MISSION AT
SHONGA, NORTHERN NIGERIA

Volunteers arrived, and now two stations had been opened.

A fruitful ministry began among the bridge construction crew as well as among the people of the town. Within two years of his arrival, Rev. C.T. Homuth had the thrill of baptizing thirty-eight new Christians in the Niger River.

Up the railway from Jebba was a large Nupe town called Mokwa. Here another mission had begun a small work²³ but was unable to carry it on. Gladly they handed it over to Mr. Banfield and by 1911 the UMC had three stations.

²²Storms, What God Hath Wrought, p. 37.

²³The Church Mission Society of London, England, began this work and had trained some good leaders, two of whom are still with the Missionary Church today.

When Mr. and Mrs. Banfield transferred to the British and Foreign Bible Society four years later, Rev. Ira Sherk took over the leadership of the Nigerian field. Since his arrival in 1907, he had trekked hundreds of miles through the Nigerian bush and now had much information concerning the west-central section of the country as well as a working knowledge of its languages. To his zeal and vision goes the credit of opening many more stations, two of them in the next three years.

The first of these was Share, thirty-four miles southeast of Jebba. Spreading out through a fertile valley, surrounded by steep hills on the west, this little town of Share gave shelter to both the Yoruba and the Nupe people. Here Mr. Sherk constructed some mission houses and sent new missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. S.S. Shantz, to begin a work. But one church for two tribes did not seem to succeed, and in 1927 Rev. C.T. Embree built a second church and the work was divided. Twenty years later a Nupe compound was built and a Nupe Bible school established in this place.

By 1916 fifteen workers had been sent to Nigeria and more were yet to come. The 1918 Christmas issue of the Gospel Banner carried a picture of seven missionaries--veterans Rev. and Mrs. Ira Sherk with new recruits Rev. and Mrs. William Finlay of Alberta, Mr. and Mrs. W.E. Lageer and Miss Nora Shantz all of Ontario. Above the picture were the words: "Nigeria's Christmas Gift, 1918." This was

apropos since the party landed at Jebba on Christmas eve.²⁴

The Lageers were stationed at Mokwa while the Finlays remained at Jebba working among both whites and blacks in that busy railway town.

In 1924 yellow fever took the life of Mr. Finlay and his sorrowing people buried him by the church at the foot of Mission Hill. Mrs. Finlay took an extended furlough but her heart was still with the Yoruba people. She returned to Nigeria and for thirty more years she lived in Share, nursing the sick, strengthening the Christians and bringing to Jesus many who came to her clinic for care.²⁵

In the meantime Misses Martha Hood, Maggie Finlay and Isabelle Hollenbeck had come out to "man" the station at Jebba. Two of them, Miss Hood and Miss Hollenbeck, spent thirty-two years in the country, bringing scores of converts into the kingdom.

Shortly after the "Christmas Gift" had landed at Lagos, Mr. Sherk set out on another of his many treks to find new sites for the work. This time his travels took him into the Oyo Yoruba area seventy-five miles southwest of Jebba. To his great surprise he came across a large town clustered around the base of four huge rocks, the largest being five hundred feet high and seven miles round at the

²⁴Huffman, p. 190.

²⁵Storms, What God Hath Wrought, p. 40.

base. This town, he was told, was Igbetti, the only place in the whole region that had successfully warded off the conquering Fulani tribe.²⁶ The villagers had camped on top of the hill "Iyamopo" and had rolled down great stones when the enemy had tried to climb up. Now the place was more peaceful, but it was steeped in idol worship. Would this prove as impregnable as Iyamopo Rock? Mr. Sherk was able to secure some land from the chief, however, and in 1921 Igbetti station was opened.

The worker who did the most to develop this work was a single man from Alberta, Rev. O.L. Traub. Living here alone for his first three years, he learned to speak Yoruba like a native and many converts turned from their idol worship to the Lord. Within ten years of his arrival, the Igbetti church had grown to have the largest Sunday morning attendance in the denomination.²⁷ The character of the town was changed, and today three large Missionary Church buildings have been erected to accommodate the hundreds who attend.

By now the Sherks had established their headquarters at Mokwa and only ladies were available for the work at Jebba. But God used the weakness of women to begin a great

²⁶The Fulanis were a North African tribe that swept southward conquering the aboriginals and imposing on them their Muslim beliefs. Most of them are nomadic cattle herders today.

²⁷By 1950 attendances reached one thousand.

work. He sent a fine Yoruba Christian, Rev. Daniel O. Taylor to be their helper and counselor. Daniel had been converted under the preaching of Mr. Finlay while working as a railway clerk in the town. During a prayer meeting message by his spiritual father, he felt that God was leading him to enter Christian work. First as a teacher, then as a pastor, this educated young man became the wise adviser, the promoter, the pastor and Bible school leader that the whole mission needed in the next forty-two years. It was through his vision and careful training of young men that many of the Yoruba leaders of the church today are so well qualified to carry on the work that missionaries once performed.

"Mission Hill," the river station at Jebba, was the source out of which much of the future work flowed.

The North Is Opened

To the north of Jebba lay a wide expanse of need. Up until 1923 the Hausa-speaking region had been closed to missionary activity because of tribal wars and unsettled conditions. A great volume of prayer went up to God for the salvation of these people.

One day in 1922 two important letters came to Mr. Sherk in his weekly mail. One was from the Mission Board at home. "JOSEPH UMMEL ACCEPTED FOR NIGERIA," it said. The second was from the Nigerian government. "PERMISSION TO ENTER TERRITORY NORTH OF MOKWA GRANTED."

What elation there was among the Christians! Nothing

had happened for so long. Now in one day two of their prayers had been answered!

Within a few months the new recruit arrived. First must come some months of language study at Jebba as well as weeks of trekking with Mr. Sherk in the region. Then the time came to move north.

Salka, among the Kambari people, was the village they had chosen. To get to this place the missionaries had to cover eighty-three miles of rugged pathways by bicycle or on foot. Behind them on the path came a string of carriers swinging along in the rhythmical, hip-swaying stride that comes from carrying a heavy load on the head.

Outside the village of Salka the Kambaris had built a grass shelter in the shade of a tree. This was to be Joseph's new home until a mud hut could be built.

Mr. Sherk left, and the new recruit was not to see another white person for one hundred and eleven days. He was shut in with God and with the people whom he had come to serve. On January 25, 1923, he wrote in his journal, "Today the devil tried hard to discourage me, but I went out in the bush by myself and had a refreshing season of prayer."²⁸

This was the beginning of the "up-country" work.

²⁸From a letter sent to the author by Mrs. Mabel Ummel, wife of Joseph, July, 1975.

The following year Rev. and Mrs. N.E. Durkee arrived to take over at Salka. After learning Hausa, they began the study of the difficult Kambari language and translated the Gospels of Mark and John within the next ten years.

In 1935 another single young man arrived in the country and, like Joseph Ummel, Rev. L. Russell Sloat went to Salka to carry on the work alone. The only missionary among a tribe of eight hundred thousand, he had the responsibility of every aspect of the work. Within three years he had ridden his bicycle four thousand miles, making a detailed map of the entire district.²⁹

In 1945 Rev. and Mrs. Arthur Reifel made Salka their home. Here with the help of veteran missionary Miss I. Hollenbeck, they built a Bible school which included a classroom block and student dwellings. Miss Hollenbeck had had experience in this type of work and helped to construct the mud-block houses with her own hands.

Into this Bible school came young men and their wives from all over the north, and out of its classroom went pastors and evangelists to supply most of the churches throughout the whole area.

For many years the Salka work was disappointing. Fear of the fetish kept the Kambaris in bondage. Only a handful of young men braved the wrath of the community and

²⁹Storms, What God Hath Wrought, p. 67.

attended the Sunday services, but even in 1952 when this author lived in the village, no Kambari woman yet dared to attend. A few people were being saved, but oh, so slowly.

Then, like a whirlwind, a change came to Salka. A fight broke out between the two factions in the pagan worship. One young man was killed. The town was electrified. Suddenly in 1974 a "people movement" began. Instead of the one by one conversions, new believers began to pour into the church by the scores. The awakening swept through the whole Salka region. Several village churches had to be replaced because of the crowds. In one village, by the time the roof was on the new church, the building was already too small for the number that came. Harvest time had come to Salka! The Lord of the Harvest was sweeping the Kambaris into the kingdom.

In Salka itself a great building project was under-way. A large church, thirty feet by eighty feet was scheduled to be constructed by the end of 1977. Christmas Sunday came and the building was ready.

Benches from the old building which is now being used for Sunday school and junior church filled less than a third of the new building. People came with home-made chairs and pieces of plank, or calabashes and mats to put on the floor.

What a crowd! Women filled half the church! (In the early years there were no women!) When the church became full, the choir members were moved onto the platform to provide more floor space, and children sat across the entire front. Although the church was full, the people still came, crowding in. Finally when no one else could squeeze in, the rest of the people had to sit around the outside of the building. . . .

Our hearts overflowed with joy and praise and our

eyes filled with tears as we looked into their faces. About ninety per cent of them including the pastor and choir director had the deep Kambari mark on their cheeks, giving evidence to the fact that they were newcomers to the faith and their parents had been pagans at the time of their birth. Only in the young pre-school children did one see many unmarked faces.

The total attendance was 1,294!

The pastor gave a simple Christmas message and sixty-seven sought the Lord at the close of the service.

No one can deny that the change has come only through the work of the Spirit of God. "One planted, another watered, but God gave the increase."³⁰

The lonely years, the discouraging years, the empty years, all the heart-breaking toil and the trials--these all have proved to be fruitful, for the Kambaris are turning to God.

A New Tribe Is Reached

One station, however, does not open the north.

When the Durkees came to man the station at Salka, Joseph Ummel moved farther north with his brother Paul who had just arrived. Here at Zuru a new work was to be opened among the Dakkarkaris, a people whose warriors were so fierce that for years the government allowed no one to enter their territory. Here Rev. Paul and Phoebe Ummel along with a number of others worked for many years, and today a strong church of about one thousand, both in Hausa and in English, stands as a monument to early examples of courage and consecration.

During the Ummels' furlough, young missionaries like Elgin and Edma Brubacher came to fill in. These new mission

³⁰R. Sloat, "New Church Opens," Emphasis 10:7 (April, 1978), p.9.

recruits were filled with the same evangelistic zeal as their predecessors, trekking for days through the African bush in order to take the Gospel to people who had not yet heard. Mr. Brubacher took with him his cook or laborer, hand-picked Timothys whom he was training to be evangelists on their own. Elgin Brubacher, it is said, alone did the work of three men. Little wonder that in 1943 before his first furlough fell due, his once-strong body became racked with tropical fevers that pushed his temperature to 108 degrees in his struggle to stay alive.

Today an out-of-the-way grave gazes quietly toward the open sky and calmly awaits the resurrection.

The year 1943 was the year of sorrow for Nigeria, for just four months before Elgin's death, veteran missionary Joseph Ummel also fell victim to a similar fever and now lies buried beside his early comrade, William Finlay.

Such lives, however, are the soil from which national leaders grow. Within a few years the church began to increase. More missionaries came out--sixteen in 1945 alone--and by 1947 the missionary force in Nigeria had doubled. New churches sprang up, more pastors applied, and new life began to flow into the work in Nigeria. Five new stations plus many more "out stations" were established as the map on the following page will show.³¹

³¹This entry is taken from Emphasis, 10:13 (July, 1978), p. 12.

FOCUS ON NIGERIA



THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS

The following message is by Jacob Bawa, president of the United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA), principal of the Ilorin Theological College, and pastor of the College Church:

WE ARE thankful to God for what He has accomplished in our beloved country, Nigeria, through the Missionary Church.

The Lord has chosen me to assume the role of leadership for His Church in Nigeria. "Leadership" in God's Word clearly means "stewardship." As leader-steward, I am called, equipped, directed, and authorized by Christ to lead His people. This is not an easy task; but knowing that I am not alone in this, I have no fear, for with Him all things are possible.

Our goals for the Church in Nigeria are: 1) evangelism and church planting; 2) training for Christian service both in Nigeria and beyond our region.

These can be accomplished only as we continually depend on the leadership of the Holy Spirit. I am ready to become all things in order to reach our goals.

Brethren, pray for us daily as we lead the Church in Nigeria.

FACTS ABOUT NIGERIA

Size—356,667 square miles

Population—80,000,000

Language—Officially English

(Plus 250 major languages)

In our Church area mainly

Hausa, Yoruba, and Nupe

Religions—Muslim 53%

Christian 29%

Animist 18%

MISSIONARIES

The following 12 missionaries are still in Nigeria:

Mr. and Mrs. George Schroeder

Mr. and Mrs. Neil McFarlane

Mr. and Mrs. Jim McDowell

Miss Esther Cressman

Miss Lois Fuller

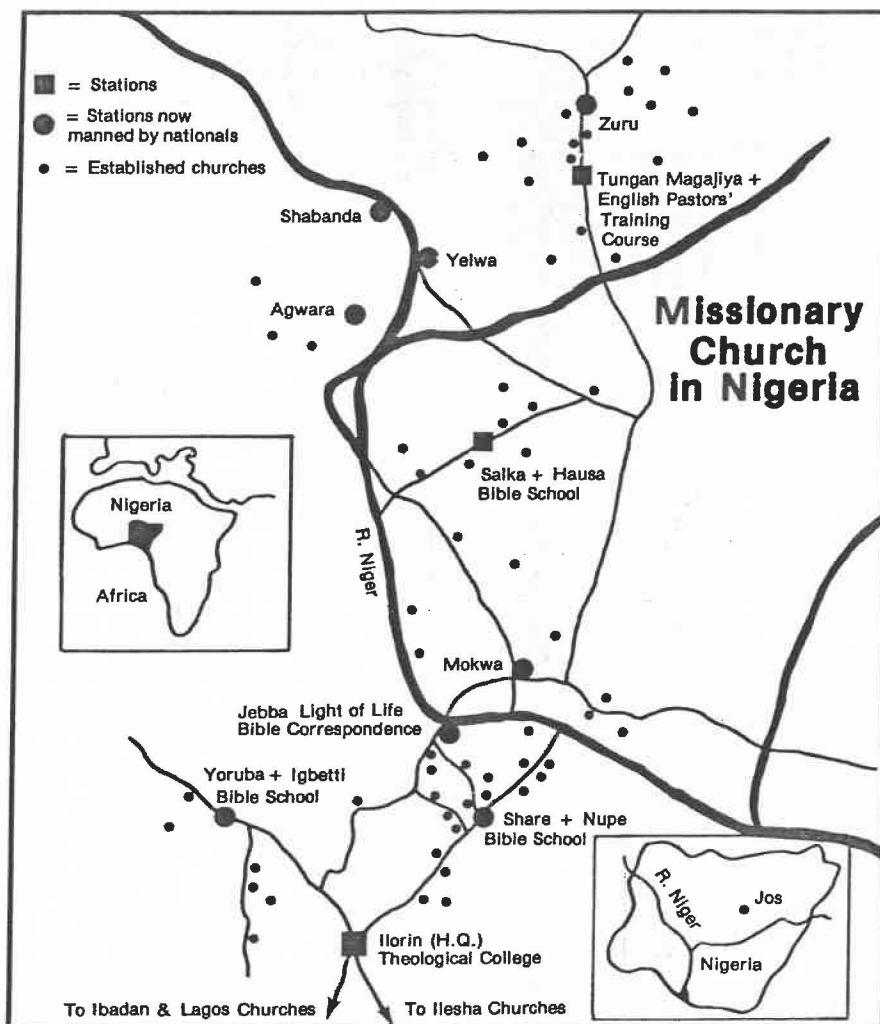
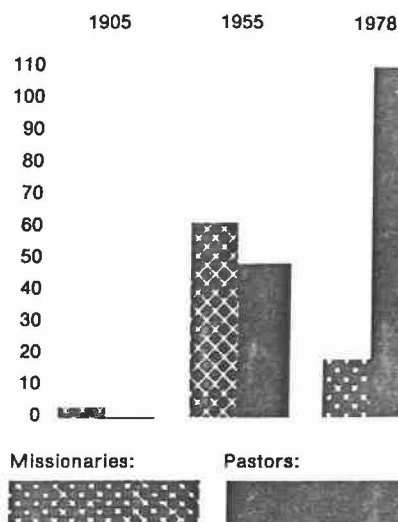
Miss Judy Post

Miss Hyla Ross

Miss Donna Skitch

Miss Joan Walsh

CHURCH GROWTH



Training Programs Are Established

Some of the new missionaries that arrived had the special gift of evangelism, and an evangelistic program was promoted. Rev. Willis Hunking, Eldon Boettger, Arthur Reifel and Ormand Sherick had an exceptional ministry in this field. The New Life For All program which brought enlightenment to thousands in Nigeria was under the direction of Mr. Hunking in the East and Western Regions. Many churches today still reap the benefit of the training they received at that time.³²

Rev. Arthur Reifel, accompanied by a pastor or Bible school student, has visited scores of new villages throughout the North and has seen many new churches established, especially in the past ten years.

In the southern districts Rev. Ormand Sherick organized pastors' retreats, pastors' seminars and the TEE program.³³ The main thrust of the seminars has been scriptural methods of church growth; and this, coupled with a course in church management taught by Field Chairman Allan Doner, prepared the national church for take-over in 1978. All three language areas have benefited from these courses.

The national leaders are also catching the vision. One of the Nigerian conferences set a goal of forty-nine

³²Eileen Lageer, New Life For All (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p.26.

³³Theological Education by Extension.

new congregations and one thousand more members in the period between 1976 and 1980. By the following year the church had made a good start. Over five hundred baptisms were recorded in the three districts during 1977, bringing the total membership to 3,256. An estimated ten thousand more adherents attend the 235 Missionary Church services³⁴ providing ample opportunity for the leaders to reach their goal. The fields are still "white unto harvest."

New churches, however, need pastors; and pastors need to be trained. Bible schools seemed to be the best answer in the late 1940's, and soon a vernacular pastors' training school was opened in each of the language areas. A school in the Hausa language was opened by the Reifels and Miss Hollenbeck at Salka. Another for the Nupe people was established at Share, and one for the Yorubas at Igbetti. In each case, a national, if qualified, was made principal and the missionary became his helper.

These were the outgrowth of simple Religious Knowledge Classes which also began through a very simple form of instruction. Early in the morning after the mission cook had the fire going and the houseboy had swept the porches, the missionary gathered all compound workers on the verandah and there he taught a simple lesson from the Word. Through this method these helpers were established in their

³⁴These figures come from the Nigerian Field Chairman's report, January, 1978.

faith. Most of the early pastors had once been cooks, laborers or other servants whose hearts were moved by the power of the Word while hearing it explained before dawn.

Now that a more intensive course of study was set up, more pastors could be provided to serve churches where the people were coming to the Lord.

Day Schools Are Begun

As families of Christians filled the churches, a new problem arose. Who would educate their children? The mission should provide Christian schools. Even the early missionaries recognized this need. One by one, as each new station was opened, simple school rooms were built, and any missionary available was commandeered to teach. Whenever the caliber of the school improved, the government made provision to pay the national teacher's salary. In 1926 permission to build was first granted to the mission, and schools were established at Mokwa, then Jebba and Zuru.

In 1937 Miss Myrtle Anderson, a teacher from Alberta, arrived to help. Jebba school became one of the largest and best-run schools in the province, and soon it grew to several hundred students. In the next ten years many other teachers arrived, so that by 1965 the UMS had seventeen elementary schools with eighty national teachers teaching over twenty-five hundred children.³⁵

³⁵Field Chairman's report, January, 1966.

Schools call for trained teachers, however, and the need for teachers demands a training program. In 1946 Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Bolender arrived from Ontario with some years of teaching experience. With the help of Miss Anderson and Mr. Sloat, a UMS Teacher Training College was established at Igbetti. It was later moved to Mokwa where its reputation for academic excellence grew quickly. For years it took first position in the Northern Region's government examinations which all TTC students are required to write.

After Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, the government gradually took over the education program of all missions although they allowed missionaries to continue to teach Bible. It was a required course even in government schools. Several UMS missionaries were assigned to this ministry and Christian workers continued to come out of day schools.

Medical Work Is Established

Schools were established for the education of the people, but there remained another great need in the country --a cry that no true missionary could close his heart against. It was the sight of disease-racked bodies, the appalling rate of infant mortality, the patient, pain-filled eyes that besought the white man for some kind of relief.

It was this that caused Rev. I.W. Sherk to open the first UMS dispensary, even though his first treatments had to be done under a tree. His training at a tropical

medicine course in London, England, gave him an opening for the Gospel in new villages that he visited.³⁶

Dispensaries were established wherever a nurse from the homeland was stationed. By 1955 there were fourteen dispensaries run by missionary nurses and trained national helpers.

When Mr. Ummel and Elgin Brubacher died in 1943 the need for a hospital became even more apparent. The women in the Women's Missionary Societies at home decided to raise money to build a hospital. The goal of \$20,000 was well exceeded in a few months--the only need now was for a doctor.

At that time a young man, Ross Bell, was finishing his medical training in Toronto, Ontario, and in 1947 he took his bride to Tungan Magajiya, the site of the hospital-to-be. Three years later, Builders Earl Honsberger and Virgil Pollock completed the construction of a twenty-bed unit and the "United Missionary Society Memorial Hospital" was dedicated in November, 1950.³⁷

Into it poured the sick and injured, some even bypassing government aid because of "the love and truth" that they heard was shown here. As more and more people came,

³⁶Storms, What God Hath Wrought, pp. 47-48.

³⁷The hospital was erected as a memorial to the UMS missionaries and missionary children who had died in Nigeria.

new wards and personnel had to be added, so that by 1961 the hospital had four wards with eighty beds, five doctors and a School of Nursing.³⁸ In one year the team performed six hundred major operations and three hundred minor ones, as well as helping with the 100,000 treatments dispensed to out-patients who flocked to the hospital for aid.

As the number of these patients grew, the need for a nursing school also increased. In 1955 the UMS School of Nursing was established, and in the seventeen years it was in operation, over one hundred nurses were graduated and sent out to minister to their people in many parts of Nigeria.

Like the education program, mission hospitals were also gradually taken over by the government, and on June 1, 1975, the "T.M. Hospital" ceased to belong to the UMS. Through the years, however, thousands had received the Gospel message in personal witness by national staff, through record players, Gospel literature and the hospital pastor. Converts went back to distant villages and there spread the Word to their people. In some instances, a group of believers was established in far-off places where no missionary or national pastor had ever set foot.

³⁸There were never more than three doctors at the hospital at one time.

Theological College Opened

As the education level of the nation improved, the need for better trained pastors also became evident. To meet this need the mission opened an English Theological College at Jebba in 1956 with Rev. John Bontrager in charge. Three years later it was moved to its present site in Ilorin, capital of Kwara State.

At first it was a certificate course only with no degrees granted, but so eager were young people for this type of teaching that students representing thirty tribes and twenty denominations came from all over Nigeria to be trained for the ministry. When a degree course was added in 1970³⁹ the enrolment quickly doubled and more faculty was added including the author of this paper. Two years later Rev. Jacob Bawa, a graduate of the college, was appointed principal, although others acted in this capacity while he was in America working on a Ph.D.

In speaking of the influence of the college, Field Chairman Russell Sloat wrote in 1977:

The college has had a vital part in training young men for the ministry. Of our eighty-six UMCA pastors, sixteen have been trained in the Theological College. Another forty-five who have been trained in one of our vernacular Bible schools were taught in those schools by men who had had their further training in the Theological College. In addition, one of our present college staff and three more in training in America

³⁹This degree was granted in conjunction with a sister college, Emmanuel Bible College, in Kitchener, Ontario.

received initial training in the Ilorin College;
also two of the Bible teachers in Sierra Leone.⁴⁰

It has been estimated that ninety per cent of all the graduates go directly into some type of church work, including the teaching of Bible in government primary and high schools in nine of the nineteen states of Nigeria.⁴¹

In connection with the college is the UMS Chapel which holds two services in English each Sunday morning. Largely through the efforts of Rev. John Bontrager and the visitation program at the college, an average of over eight hundred adults and six hundred children flood onto the college campus each Sunday morning. Many who come are government officials--commissioners, doctors, dentists, professors and college students. These give generously to the Lord's work, assisting with the operating costs of the college. They have also established and continue to support the private nursery and primary schools on the campus which now enroll over seven hundred children.

The Missionary Church serves the spiritual needs of Ilorin in other ways. While the College Chapel people are in service, three other MC congregations are also meeting in the city. Each conducts the service in its own language. With three language groups using one of the buildings at different hours each Sunday, the number of attendants in

⁴⁰Russell Sloat, "The Best Is In Chapter Three," Emphasis, 10:13 (July, 1978), p. 14.

⁴¹John Bontrager, "The Future in Nigeria," Emphasis, 7:16 (September, 1975), p. 11.

Ilorin Missionary churches would exceed three thousand on a given Sunday. Other evangelical churches in the area speak of similar numbers for the interest of Nigerians in the Christian message is increasing steadily.

The Church Matures

Through faithful instruction, through godly counsel, through pastoral training, through retreats and seminars, the Church in Nigeria has become mature. It has not happened in a day. Step by step the mission has brought it to a place of strong leadership such as it enjoys today.

Back in 1949 Field Chairman Russell Sloat's "keen insight into what was both necessary and desirable in promoting Nigerian leadership in the church"⁴² was the push behind a committee being appointed to study ways and means of indigenizing the work. For five years steady progress was made. The mission kept its eyes on 1955--the Golden Jubilee of the UMS work in Nigeria. Could they have the church organized by then?

The goal was more than reached. In November, 1954, the United Missionary Church of Africa was brought into being as another member of the Missionary Church International. Under this organization three conferences were formed, the Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba, each having its own District Superintendent and administering its own affairs.

⁴²Wayne Brenneman, "The Indigenous Church in Nigeria," (unpublished article, 1978), p. 5.

In order to take care of matters pertaining to the work as a whole, a joint council was established to which these conferences and the UMS sent representatives. In everything except Bible school training, the churches were self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating.

Since that time responsibility for all ministries begun by the mission has gradually been assumed by the Church. The Light of Life Bible Correspondence School, for instance, once directed by missionaries only, is now completely under the management of the UMCA. In 1977 Director Samuel Oloyede reported,

Our courses have entered many homes, schools, colleges, army and police barracks, prisons, market-places and urban centers all over Nigeria. Many show appreciation for the lessons, and in one year have sent in \$3,340 in gifts . . . while the testimony of one enrollee indicates the program's effect: "I was to face a firing squad as an armed robber, but the Lord led me to this prison yard where I met the Lord Jesus through the study of your courses. I am now a child of God instead of following the devil to hell. Glory be to God!"⁴³

Another ministry that is now completely administered by Nigerians is the Christian Life Classes in government schools. Following a request from the Yoruba church, this program came into being in 1957 under the direction of Miss Edna Pridham. A series of five lessons with excellent visual aids was held in each UMS school. Soon government, Catholic and even Muslim-controlled community schools were asking for the program. In 1969 forty thousand children in

⁴³Emphasis, 9:11 (June, 1977), p. 13.

eighty-two schools were reached with the Gospel. Helpers were needed, and Theological College graduates joined the team. On June 26, 1972, a car accident took the life of Edna Pridham while she and her team were conducting the classes. News of the tragedy filtered throughout the country and letters came in from many areas telling how it was in one of these classes that this one or that one had been brought to the Lord.

The program did not cease. Emmanuel Akinlawon, one whom Miss Pridham had trained, took over the work and directed the team for two years. It continues to serve under national leadership today.

One by one the ministries were given over into the competent hands of nationals until only the Theological College and the Dukka Bible translation work were being directed by the mission. On January 5, 1978, the Missionary Church in Nigeria entered a completely new era. That day the UMS handed over full responsibility to the national church.

A large crowd from every part of UMCA territory including government officials of Kwara State gathered in the College Chapel, Ilorin. Among those on the platform was Rev. Russell Sloat to whose admirable leadership and forty-three years of exemplary dedication must go much of the credit for the significance of that day. As part of the impressive program he reviewed the progress of the mission

in its seventy-three years of service:

After forty years in the country there were only about fifteen missionaries on the field. Then . . . from 1945 to 1955 the mission grew to over sixty. . . . There were seven stations up to 1945 and seven more at the end of 1955. That was the end of mission expansion and growth, and it was the high point of missionary activity.

About that time we began to see the strength of the Nigerian Church. There were forty-nine pastors in 1955. There were also three Bible schools. . . . The Light of Life had been started. . . . Tungan Magajiya hospital had been opened. . . the Theological College was planned but it did not open until January, 1956. . . . There were fourteen dispensaries. . . .

In 1955, fifty years after the first missionary came, we made application in Lagos for registration of the United Missionary Church of Africa. The final answer came back in 1956. From 1954 it was "working together" for the UMS and UMCA. . . . We had over sixty missionaries at the end of the first fifty-year period. Today we have only eighteen. There were forty-nine pastors in the UMCA in 1955. Today there are 110. So the UMCA has gone ahead and we thank the Lord for it.⁴⁴

President of the Nigerian Missionary Church is Dr. Jacob Bawa; vice-president is Rev. James Harman. Chosen as Executive Secretary is Rev. Samuel Oloyede, a full-time administrator who now bears most of the responsibility of the church. Serving with them are four area conference boards with a Church District Superintendent over each. The General Conference of the UMCA meets every year.

Progress

Those early missionaries moving slowly up the Niger toward Shonga could hardly visualize that not long after they

⁴⁴Emphasis, 10:13 (July, 1978), p. 14.

had fallen asleep in Jesus the church would have grown to 235 congregations, 3,500 baptized members with 117 pastors and recognized workers. At one time the missionaries took all the initiative and the new converts followed their lead. Today it is the national church that leads and the missionaries who assist. Those workers who still serve today are not merely marking time until their work is finished; they are an integral part of a spiritual force--both black and white--that is pushing on to greater success in the task Christ has given His Church to do.

Seventy-five years between the coming of the first missionary and the remaining of only a few, but within that full circle of time, a church has been planted in Nigeria that continues to have a widespread ministry that is all out of proportion to its size.

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