

## History of the PCG

### THE BEGINNINGS

The facts of the beginnings of the PCG are now so well known that one does not need to repeat the details here. The stories of the heroic decision of the Basel Mission to undertake mission work in the Gold Coast and the sacrifices that they had to make to sustain the mission continue to be cited with pride and gratitude to God by many Ghanaians today. The year 1828 will forever remain significant in the life of our church because this was the year of arrival of the very first missionaries from Basel. The Basel Mission that sent them had been founded in mainly businessmen, industrialists and philanthropists who wanted to make a totally different impact on Africa that their slave trading compatriots had done. They were interested in a practical demonstration of Christian love to fellow human beings, and therefore attracted people from varying backgrounds and expertise.

They also insisted that persons offering themselves for this task should be persons “with a deep sense of humility”. The reason for demanding these qualities was obvious. They were not going to be the first to attempt evangelization in the Gold Coast. As far back as 1471, Portuguese Catholics had arrived on the Gold Coast and had attempted to spread the Gospel, but had failed woefully because many other motives accompanied their evangelization motive. After a few years, commercial interest totally submerged that of the Gospel. The slave trade made it difficult, if not impossible for any clear distinction to be made between missionaries and traders. Soon the recipients of the good news became victims of slavery, and mammon planted his kingdom where Christ's should have been. Other nations also made a few half-hearted attempts with no lasting results. In the early 18th century, the Moravians had also embarked on an ambitious evangelization propaganda, beginning from Elmina and ending in failure at Christiansburg. The period between these attempts and the arrival of the Basel Mission was, for the ordinary observer, an era of fruitless endeavour, but from the perspective of God's salvation history, it was a preparatory period for the baptism of fire that was to come. The abolition of the slave trade at the beginning of the 19th century was an indication that something new was going to happen in the Gold Coast.

The Basel Mission was that new thing.

The first event of significance in our history therefore was the arrival of the first missionaries from Basel. When they arrived at Osu, it was exactly one week before Christmas and two weeks before the end of the year. Symbolically, they had come to witness the birth of Christ in the Gold Coast in a new way. Hardly anything of significance is known to have happened in the short period of stay of these first missionaries, for all four of them died before the end of the following year. However, the few months of their lives that they spent in Osu must have touched a few lives. For eight months, they interacted with the people of Osu, started learning the Ga language, made a few friends and even attempted starting a school. Their immediate successors who arrived in 1832 made similar efforts, renting a house at Osu and living among the people. Two of the three who came also died within missionaries has been largely overlooked in the narration of our history, often due to the attention given to the work of Andreas Riis whose commitment and industry ensured that the mission was not abandoned. It was he who in the face of much frustration and possible death, took the bold decision to move from Osu to Akropong to make a new attempt. He also initiated exploratory moves into Akyem and other areas before returning to Basel in 1840. It is however necessary to put these other missionaries out of obscurity and acknowledge their role however little, in our history.

## **REFUSING TO GIVE UP**

The next important date and event of significance in the life of the PCG was 17th April 1843 when a large group of African descendants from Jamaica landed at Osu to begin another phase of the Basel Mission evangelization work. They had been recruited purposely to help convince the people of the Gold Coast that the Christian religion was not reserved for Europeans alone. They had also been recruited because it was believed that they could withstand the tropical climate more than the Europeans who too easily succumbed to malaria. This was an experiment which had been tried successfully in Sierra Leone where former African slaves became the principal missionaries to the African population. The Niger Mission had also proved that Africans were best suited for the work of evangelism in Africa.

The arrival of these gallant volunteers in Osu and their subsequent settlement in Akropong signaled the beginning of progress in the Christian mission in the Gold Coast. Their work has been variously documented and acknowledged, although not with the proportionate emphasis that it deserves. The facts are however clear that there would be no PCG today if those men and women had not offered to come to Osu and Akropong.

The building of a formidable and sustainable foundation for the mission was almost entirely the work of these Missionaries. The years 1843 to 1845 were crucial years during which their endurance and commitment were tested to the full. Some left the mission in frustration, but others held on to the vision of building an indigenous Christian community and eventually achieved a breakthrough. Once the first baptisms had been performed in 1847, a seminary was established the following year for the training of local people in the work of the mission, and from this point on there was no turning back.

Before long, the Basel Mission was on the move, reaching into the other Akwapim towns and beyond into Akyem, Krobo and Agona areas. Within a decade of the arrival of the Jamaicans, a Basel Mission Church had come into existence, and by the end of the second decade, Anum and the Volta Buem areas had been added to the field work. Moreover, a good number of local people had been recruited by this time for the ministry of the church in various capacities. Osu, the coastal mission station was meanwhile undertaking a similar exercise into the surrounding towns of La and Teshie. It was during this period that Abokobi was founded and became one of the most significant mission stations of the Basel Mission. Situated at the foot of the Akwapim hills, Abokobi provided a comfortable rest stop between Osu and Akropong. So when in 1854 the Christians in Osu and La had to flee their towns owing to the British bombardment, Abokobi became a safe haven for them. The new settlers developed the cottage into a well planned village and went out from there to bring the good news to the surrounding Villages.

The growth and consolidation of the Basel Mission presence occurred between 1850 and 1870, a period that saw the arrival in the Gold Coast of many talented and committed missionaries from Europe. Within this period spanning two decades, the church reached out to many areas of Southern Ghana and made inroads into many traditional setups, drawing occasional confrontation and controversy. It was also the period that saw the establishment of the first eight mission stations of the church, namely, Osu, Abokobi, Akropong, Aburi, Kibi, Odumase-Krobo, Anum and Ada. By 1866, Johannes Zimmerman had finished translating the whole Bible into Ga, followed by Christaller's Twi translation in 1870. Other names that featured prominently in this period were those of Simon Suss, Eilas Schrenk, Hans Rottmann and a host of African agents and collaborators. The opportunity presented by this period was quite timely, and the PCG did well to grab it and use it to maximum benefit. Things would have been very difficult if this opportunity had been allowed to slip by.

## **ASHANTI AND BEYOND**

The stories about the penetration of the Christian mission into Ashanti and beyond are another significant event in the life of the church which must be mentioned again at this time of celebration. The most exciting of these stories are those surrounding the Rev. Fritz Ramseyer and his contribution to the mission. It would surely be wrong to say that Ramseyer achieved everything alone, but he was the man God used at that time. He was a man who God put in the right place at the right time. Without a man of his caliber and commitment, it would have taken much more time and energy to get the Gospel grounded in Kwahu and Ashanti and beyond. It is a well known story that needs no re-telling, but there are certain aspects of it which have made us the church we are today. The stories of the Kwahu and Ashanti missions in which he featured are important because they constituted an important step in the Basel Mission's unrelenting efforts to reach beyond the area where they started. The story of Kwahu, although not altogether smooth was not as intriguing and difficult as that of Ashanti.

The Ashanti kingdom had been traditionally averse to the establishment of any European institutions. The Methodist mission into Ashanti in the 1840 had limited success and lasted for only a few years because of general hostility to the church. But the Ashanti wars of domination finally brought them into direct confrontation with British forces who were allies of the coastal tribes. The invasion of Anum and the subsequent capture and imprisonment of the Ramseyer finally gave the British an excuse to attack and defeat the Ashantis in the Sagrenti War of 1874. Ramseyer who was released and assigned to Abetifi, became the moving spirit behind the evangelization of the area. Towards the end of the century, he also undertook mission work in Kumasi, and by 1899, thirty baptisms had taken place there. Ramseyer wrote in a report.

“It is no longer a dream; I am again in Kumasi and can now say (that) Kumasi is a Basel Mission Station....”

From this time on, the mission spread out from Kumasi to Techimantia and subsequently to other parts of the kingdom and the Brong Ahafo areas. The interruption of the Yaa Asantewaa wars of 1900 was only brief and did not affect the mission in any significant way. It is now virtually impossible to talk of the PCG without reference to the branch of the church in Ashanti and beyond.

As far as the Northern parts of Ghana are concerned, the Presbyterian presence may be traced to the beginning of the 20 century. The Basel Mission had made exploratory visits to Salaga, Kete Krachi and Kpandai as early as 1876 but conditions were then not conducive for the start of full scale mission work. When however, the Northern Ghana became a British protectorate in 1901, six more expeditions were undertaken, and finally in 1912 three Basel missionaries (Otto Schimming, Immanuel Kless and Hans Huppenbauer) were allowed to settle in Yendi.

They established a school and clinic and started reaching out to the surrounding areas. Progress was however halted by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 which led to the expulsion of the missionaries from the Gold Coast. The mission was however restored after the war and by the end of the second decade of the 20th century congregations were to be found in Tamale and Salaga in addition to Yendi. Today, the PCG in Northern Ghana is one of the most interesting aspects of our mission. One wonders what the impact of our mission would be today without the significant Northern dimension. The inclusion of the north in the Presbyterian may have made it possible for us to describe ourselves as a truly national church.

## **THE SALEM PATTERN**

Another issue of significance in our history is the system of community living introduced by the Basel Mission for its converts. No narrative of our history is complete without reference to this innovative and practical response to a prevailing situation. The very fabric of traditional society was held together by the adherence of all members to rules and taboos established and passed on from generation to generation. Deviant behaviour was intolerable under all circumstances since it constituted not only an affront to authority but also a danger to social cohesion and welfare. Converts to Christianity therefore often found themselves confronted with situations of conflict regarding their-new faith and their participation in certain rituals and practices. Many converts were incapable of standing against the weight of traditional society which sought to compel them to conform. The few who stood up and defied the traditional authorities found themselves ostracized or banished and sometimes even stood in danger of being killed. Mission work was most difficult under such circumstances; pastoral care and counseling was almost impossible and the nurture of converts suffered considerably.

Faced with the reality of this pervasion social control system of traditional administration, the missionaries had to develop a means by which some form of control could be exercised over their converts. The Salem system was their solution to this problem. The missionaries bought land, usually on the outskirts of the town or village and created new settlements where the converts could live away from the other people. In these new settlements they would be freed from the restrictions and obligations of the traditional systems and subject only to Christian pastoral care, and eventually become missionaries to their own people. The Salems flourished in many towns and villages and helped in no small way in the growth of the Christian mission. The well arranged houses with flower gardens were a novelty in many towns in the Gold Coast and thus soon became examples of orderly living which was copied by others. Most of the Salems have now become part of the main towns as the towns developed towards them.

The Salem system, in spite of its many positive aspects, has been criticized for introducing division into the Ghanaian society. It has been attacked for creating Christian gentlemen and ladies who acquired European tastes and habits and displayed glaring disdain for traditional norms and practices. It also produced a class society where the educated Christians had access to better jobs and prosperity, and started to regard the inhabitants of the traditional areas as uncivilised and barbarous. The Salems also no doubt undermined the authority of the traditional rulers and jeopardised social cohesion.

In spite of these criticisms, almost every beneficiary of the system will testify to its immense contribution to the growth and modernization of the communities in which they existed. The character training and discipline characteristic of the Salems is something that many adult Christians still cherish. It is a fact that without the Salems, the growth of the church would have been stunted and perhaps even curtailed in some areas.

## **MANAGING OUR OWN AFFAIRS**

The edifying stories of Basel Mission success were in no way limited to the German and Swiss missionaries alone. The PCG was from the beginning a Church that produced local leadership who not only assisted the missionaries but also became missionaries to their compatriots. By the early 1850s the first products of the Akropong Seminary had started coming out as trained teachers and catechists, and in no time, were competent enough either to be put in charge of some of the stations or sent out to evangelise. These include David Asante who was even sent for further training in Basel and was ordained a minister and put in charge

of Larteh. Other local leaders emerged in the ensuing years and became the field force of the mission. Therefore, by the end of the 1870s, African agents, including the Jamaicans, were working alongside the European missionaries. The Jamaicans had by now fully integrated and some had entered into marriage with local people.

In 1914, when the First World War broke out and the Basel missionaries were made to leave the Gold Coast, the task of sustaining the mission fell squarely on the shoulders of the local agents, and they held the fort satisfactorily until the arrival of the Scottish Mission team. The Scottish team, led by the Rev. Dr. A.W. Wilkie, teamed up with the Africans and initiated a reform of the administrative structure of the church. Gradually the church moved from the centrally-controlled model and adopted a more democratic model in line with Reformed polity. In 1918, Rev. Wilkie helped to organize the first Synod meeting of the church which elected the first Moderator, Rev. Peter Hall and the first Synod Clerk, Rev. N.T. Clerk, both of whom were descendant of the pioneer Jamaican missionaries. When in 1926, the Basel missionaries were allowed to return, they found themselves having to fit into the new structure, and this they did although with a little reluctance. In any case, the cooperation between the Basel and Scottish missionaries on the one hand and the African agents on the other was rather cordial and ensured that the church continued to flourish and face the future with confidence. The PCG has not looked back since. The PCG story would certainly have been different if local leadership had not been developed right from the beginning. That is why they also deserve mention at this time.

#### **FROM THEN TO NOW**

Today, the PCG is a key player in Ghanaian society; it has continued to make great strides in every area of life of the people of Ghana. By the end of 2004, the Church was running a total of 1,907 schools and a University. It has been the champion of the use of local languages for 176 years and had done much work in reducing them into writing. A total of 37 health institutions and seven agricultural development programmes were under the care of the church. There is a thriving market ministry as well as a prison ministry run by competent agents of the church in addition to numerous initiatives in social evangelism at both national and local levels. Currently, the pervasive influence of the PCG is evident everywhere. Its members can now be found all over the world. There are about twenty congregations bearing the name of the PCG in Western Europe and North America.

About 10 years ago, the Synod Committee sought a new direction for the church and took a decision to review the regulations, Practice and Procedure which had been the basis of our structure and government for many years. This was the seventh time since 1918 that this document had been subjected to review, and it was meant to keep the church in tune with developments both within and without its environment. It was also meant to provide a constitution that would enable the introduction of the General Assembly system into the church's administration. The new constitution came into force in 2000 and Synod was accordingly abolished and replaced with the general assembly as the supreme court of the church.

The stories of our involvement in the lives of the people can fill many books and we should continue telling it to succeeding generations. After 175 years, the PCG, with a membership of about 527,000 is still marching on, full of hope and promise. She has faced and continues to face many challenges but has a store of achievements and experience that keeps her focused. It is a church that believes that her task is not yet accomplished for as long as there are still people in Ghana and elsewhere who do not belong to Christ.

Spurred on by her motto, she looks forward to the day when the whole world will be one, united in that name which is above every name - JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD

## **VISION & MISSION STATEMENT**

### **OUR VISION STATEMENT**

“To be a Christ Centered, Self- Sustaining and Growing Church”

### **OUR MISSION STATEMENT**

“To uphold the Centrality of the Word of God and through the enablement of the Holy Spirit, pursue a holistic ministry so as to bring all of creation to glorify God;

- i. Mobilizing the entire Church for prayer
- ii. Improving growth through evangelism and nurture
- iii. Attaining Self- Sufficiency through effective resource mobilization
- iv. Promoting Socio-economic development through advocacy and effective delivery of social services
- v. Upholding the Reformed Tradition
- vi. Cherishing partnership with the worldwide body of Christ.

### **Core Values**

1. The Centrality of the Word of God
2. Discipline
3. Hardwork
4. Integrity
5. Humility
6. Unity
7. Upholding Democratic Principles
8. Godly Leadership and Skills Development
9. Sound Moral Principles
10. Upholding Democratic Principles