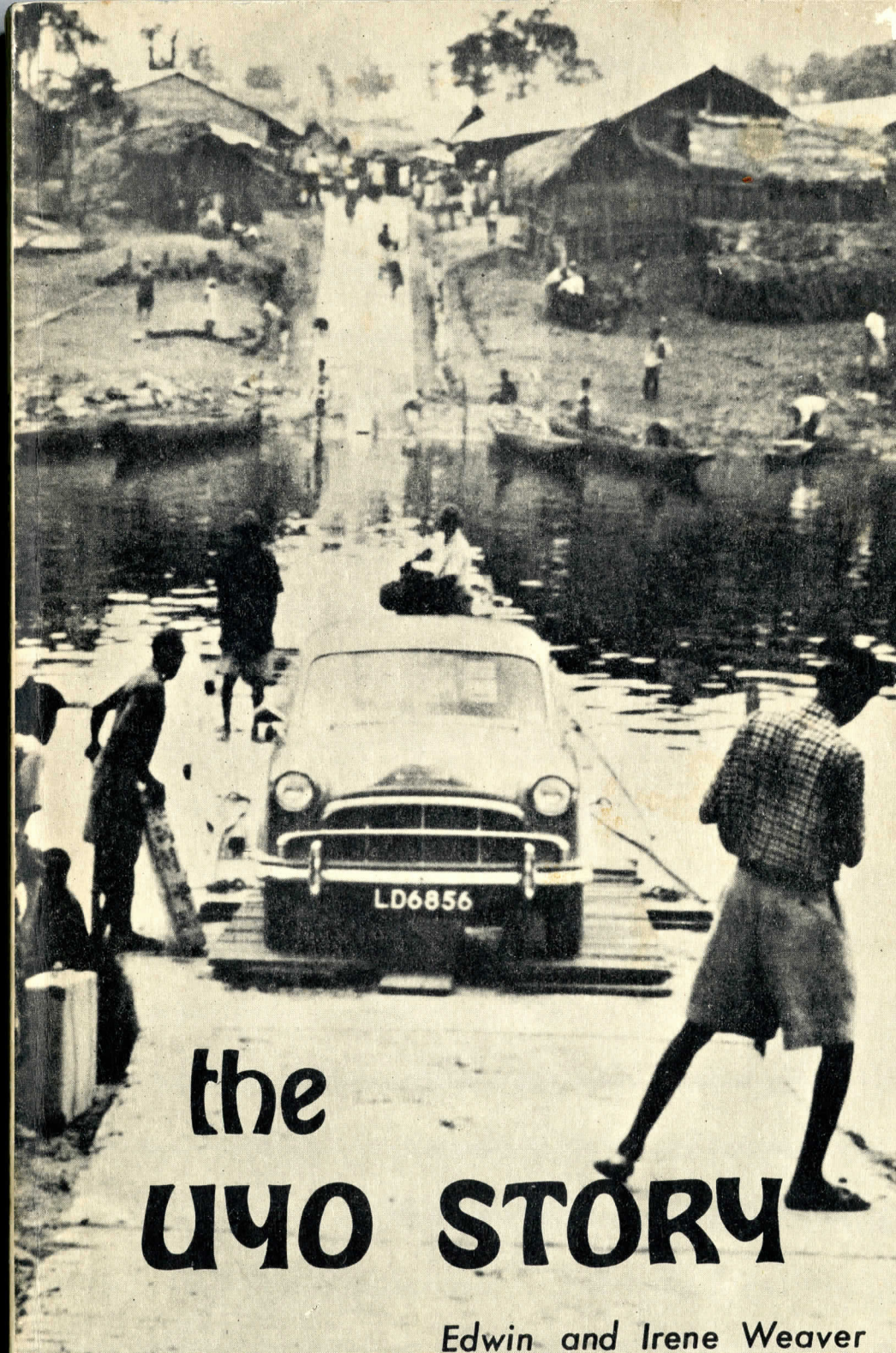


A black and white photograph of a vintage car, possibly a 1940s model, with the license plate LD6856. The car is parked on a dirt road in a village setting. Several people are visible around the car and in the background. In the foreground, a man in a plaid shirt and shorts is walking away from the car. To the left, another man is leaning over a suitcase. The background shows traditional thatched-roof houses and more people walking along the road.

the UYO STORY

Edwin and Irene Weaver

THE UYO STORY

by

Edwin and Irene Weaver

Published by
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The Cover: Ferry scene near Itu at the mouth of the Cross River.

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FOREWORD

There are many imponderables which confound us in understanding the planting and development of the church in the world. That many factors combine to prepare a people for responding to the Christian message is well known. What is not known is how to measure or anticipate that state of readiness or even how to bring it about. In spite of the most assiduous efforts by missionaries in some places over a long period of time, there has been no significant response. In other instances there has been a seemingly spontaneous rapid growth of the church which almost defies explanation.

The "independency" movement throughout Africa has been receiving serious notice for a variety of reasons. First, the dynamic vitality and scope of the movement indicates that it is a spontaneous and genuine development. Second, it is a telling commentary on some of the deficiencies in the life of the mission-established churches in Africa who are spiritually and morally heavily dependent on the western church. Third, the independent churches' path of development points toward some of the factors that must be given much more weight by the African church if she is to stay in touch with tomorrow's Africa. Fourth, independence in Africa is a complex manifestation. Many independent churches stand with outstretched hand toward other churches and western missions. It is a call loaded with much potential for good or for ill.

The Uyo Story is very much a field document. Edwin and Irene Weaver responded to a call to come to Nigeria in 1959 to help one such group of independent churches who had of their own accord adopted the name "Mennonite."

The authors tell with candor and charity some of the early disillusionments and frustrations which gradually yielded place to a new vision of opportunities. It was a vision which challenged them and the church to take new risks and attempt new approaches. It was a vision which sustained them and their colleagues through the inevitable rough spots, and which gave them courage to face opposition and misunderstanding.

The present narrative attempts to give a clearer understanding of "independency." It is the story of what one mission tried to do in relating to this very vital part in the development of the church in Nigeria.

Wilbert R. Shenk
Secretary for Overseas Missions
Mennonite Board of Missions

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INTRODUCTION: PART I

The burden of *The Uyo Story* has long been weighing heavily upon our hearts. We first started writing it back in 1961, only a year and a half after our arrival in Nigeria, in response to a "Come over to Africa and help us." The original story was mimeographed a number of times, and given out at the request of friends and interested persons until the supply was exhausted. During the year 1963 an abridged version appeared in the *Gospel Herald*. Frequent requests have come to us for a reprinting. While waiting in New York for a visa to return to Nigeria we have completed a rewriting.

We have hesitated having the story printed at this time. As we again read the original, there is so much expression of feelings which we can no longer accept. We hope that our readers will understand that we are speaking here of experiences and our reactions to them which actually took place between 1960 and 1963. On the other hand, there may be real value in leaving the story much as it was: as expressing the emotion and tension we experienced in the early days of our arrival in Uyo. In our writing, living through the experiences again, we wonder how we ever survived. But we did!

THIS IS AFRICA

The Ikot Ada Idem Mennonite Church at the Weavers' arrival in Uyo, November 1959. S. J. Hostetler (center), and his wife, Ida, veteran missionaries in India and Ghana, met the Weavers in Lagos and accompanied them to Uyo.



We were nearing Uyo when we came to a sign by the side of the road. It read: "Mennonite Church Nigeria, Inc., Ikot Ada Idem." We stopped the car. In no time at all we were surrounded by people. Walking down the path from the village, a small gentleman came quickly toward us. He introduced himself as M. E. Umanah, the leader of the people who had called us to Nigeria. We were warmly welcomed.

Just beyond us, hidden among the palms, was a little mud-thatched Mennonite church which was to become the scene of our first conferences. Here we became acquainted with the first Nigerian leaders. Here, too, we struggled, oh so intensely, to understand each other. An enclosed area carefully marked off in the back compound gave silent witness to animist ritual. Would we from the West ever really know what happened there? Would our African bush churches always keep their beliefs and practices a secret from us?

Less than a year before, we knew little about Nigeria. When an unexpected letter from the Mission Board arrived, we had to study the map. Was Nigeria east, or west, or north of Ghana? The letter, much as we tried to push it aside, became a priority in our thinking. Finally, like Hezekiah, we spread it out before the Lord. Nigeria would be a new field, new people, new culture, and a new language. It would mean pioneering. Our hearts seemed so full of India, of Hesston College and church, and, perhaps more than anything else, our own family. Could we make room for Nigeria too? God's spirit led. In the working out of events which followed we accepted the call to serve in Nigeria. At the Mission Board meeting in Hesston in 1959 we received our commission.

As we left Hesston, Elkhart, Blooming Glen and New York, we were constantly encouraged by the promise, "It is the Lord who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed" (Deut. 31:8).

The lights of New York dimmed into darkness as we looked away from America for the fourth time. This time we were setting our hearts toward Africa. Our diary for October 20, 1959, reflects our feelings: "Nigeria bound! God has gently taken India into His archives to be kept for some future time. We know that in His plan there will be a time when He will show us how India and Nigeria fit together. At this point we remember the words of an old song:

“ ‘We know not what awaits us,
 God kindly veils our eyes,
 And o’er each step of our onward way
 He makes new scenes to rise;
 And every joy He sends us comes a sweet
 and glad surprise.

“ ‘So on we go not knowing,
 We would not if we might,
 We’d rather walk in the dark with God
 Than go alone in the light;
 We’d rather walk by faith with Him, than
 go alone by sight.

“ ‘Where He may lead we’ll follow, — We’ll sing He knows,
 He knows!’ ”

Freetown, Monrovia, Abidjan, Takoradi, Lagos: ever increasingly Africa. We first heard the drums — so much a part of this continent’s life and culture — as our ship lay anchored one night in the harbour of Monrovia. We were to learn in the days to come that the African drum says many things. Drums speak in a worship service, at weddings, at births, at deaths. There are drums for sending messages from one village to another. To the beat of the drums the young and the old dance in the light of the moon — in village Africa.

One month and one day after leaving New York we stepped ashore in Lagos. Finally, this was Nigeria. The S. J. Hostetlers¹ came from Ghana to meet us. Together we traveled to Uyo which was 500 miles farther east, not far from the coast. After purchasing a car in Lagos, which we dubbed “the Dutchess,” we began the long trip through inland country of the western region, to the deep palm forests of the coastal east. The rainy season had just ended, leaving the countryside a luxuriant green.

We passed through Ibadan with its modern university and hospital. We went on to Benin, historically famous for its wars, its carved ebony heads, and its centuries old bronze works. Here we had our first experience of staying in an African hotel. The Catering Rest House was full.

¹ The Hostetlers came to Uyo first, during 1958 and 1959, to establish contact with the Independent Church leaders who were asking for help. They stayed several weeks at a time and visited in many of the congregations.

Every large city or town in this part of Africa has its catering rest house for tourist and traveller. Though quite different, they serve the same purpose as the American motel. The large central unit of the rest house is the restaurant and may be surrounded by five to sixty chalets, depending on the size of the town. Each chalet is furnished with comfortable beds, mosquito nets, and hot and cold running water. On this initial trip and many later trips through the country we used this convenience whenever possible. On this particular night, however, there was no room in the rest house, so we went to an African hotel in the center of town. Long into the night we heard the beating of drums. We went to sleep thinking this is Africa. This is

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Even the syncopated rhythm couldn’t keep us awake. By now these words have become a household phrase.

On The Banks Of The Niger

The next day we travelled on to the west bank of the Niger, that grand old Mississippi of Nigeria. Here we had to wait two hours for the ferry. The noon-day sun was cruelly bright and hot. Taxis and loories² soon joined the steaming line back of us awaiting their turns for crossing. As we waited we watched the picturesque African life. People fished and bathed and washed their clothes in the river. Women leisurely sold vegetables and food to passersby. Children with baskets of peeled oranges made their way through the crowd of waiting travellers. Little canoes plied up and down the river.

Over a hundred years before, traders and missionaries had traveled by canoe on the waters of this famous river. We thought of the coming of those early missionaries. They faced the dangers of wildlife, disease, and tropical heat. Today we have modern medicine to aid us; we can keep ahead of malaria which took the lives of so many foreigners in the early days. Our trip from Lagos was only a matter of two days, and that in a comfortable car, while they spent days in unprotected boats and in

² British term for “truck.”

walking through the bush in tropical climate.

We wrote in our diary as we crossed the Niger: "(November 20, 1959) God who are we that Thou art mindful of us? Our coming is so easy in comparison to those who have gone before. Help us through these trying days of physical adjustment. Oh God, help us to discipline ourselves in this climate so that we may be able to do the work which You are calling us to do."

Landing on the east bank of the Niger brought us into the eastern region. There were three main regions in this country. The northern region is by far the largest and is mainly Moslem in religion and culture. Christianity and Islam dominate the western region. The eastern region is mostly Christian and pagan or animist. We learned that Christianity has a strong influence in this part of Nigeria. Practically everyone considers himself a Christian. The fact remains, however, that traditional religion still has a strong hold on the lives of many people. Living in this part of Africa where the main slave traffic was carried on, one gets an entirely new viewpoint of what happened in those terrible, early days when both Europeans and Africans were involved in trafficking with human souls. How different is the Africa of today! Nigeria is no longer the Slave Coast. All the world is watching the progress of Nigeria.

We came on to Onitsha on the east bank of the Niger, Onitsha with its famous cloth market. We came to Aba, a large inland city, and on to the sign by the side of the road.

Go Slow Through Uyo

After our brief initial visit with Mr. Umanah, we came to another sign at the edge of Uyo. It read: "Go slow through Uyo."

Seeing Uyo for the first time we were filled with many kinds of feelings. We knew we had to like the place for this was to be our home. This was a new world, so indescribably different from any we had ever known. After spending three weeks with us, the Hostetlers prepared to return to their work in Ghana. We followed them for several miles as they left Uyo. At a sign (even the bush in Nigeria is full of signs) reading "Holy Child Jesus," we turned left into the bush. There we prayed and wept together and said good-bye. We felt alone. They turned west, following the long road back to Accra; we turned east and back to our home in Uyo. Many times later we stopped at this spot in the bush some distance down the road from the "Holy Child Jesus" sign to recapture the feelings of that intense struggle. There may be no stones to mark the altar we raised at that time; but there is an altar there, a very real one.

Our hearts sank with the dread of being alone in the difficulties which faced us. It was not the fear of pioneer mission work. We had long been accustomed to new and strange conditions under which missionaries must often serve. We were not afraid of living in the bush; in fact this intrigued us. No, we were not afraid of any of these things. But we were plagued with doubts. Had we come to the right place? There were churches, churches everywhere. Very early, on the five roads which fan out from the center of Uyo, we found seventy-five churches within a radius of five miles. How many more were still hidden in the bush we could only guess. These people have too many churches we thought!

There were doubts about the fifty Mennonite churches we had come to shepherd. Why had they splintered from the old mission churches? Why had they kept on changing so quickly from one church to another until they became Mormons? And, finally, why had they made the change from Mormon to Mennonite? What did they really want?

Everywhere we went among the newly formed Mennonite churches we were enthusiastically received. Their gifts were generous. We were almost overwhelmed with their kindness. Everywhere we were welcomed with written addresses which included urgent requests for hospitals and schools. What we saw about us just didn't tally with these requests. Things didn't add up. We saw schools everywhere. We found good hospitals and maternity clinics. It was all confusing. Gradually we learned that in Africa, too, as in other parts of the world, one does not take everything at face value. We were learning, too, how easily an uninitiated foreigner can jump to wrong conclusions.

"Go slow through Uyo" had little meaning for us when we first arrived! Very shortly we understood that these words were meant for us!

DANIEL'S WIVES

We checked off the list: water bucket, soap, towels, sheets, mosquito nets, camp stove, cooking pan, lantern, kerosine. . . . The mixing bowls, we had almost forgotten them! So we scurried about to find three, one each, for bathing, laundering, and dishwashing. When all was accumulated we packed everything into empty beer boxes which at that time were very versatile pieces of furniture in our house.

Thus we completed our preparations for the twenty-five mile trip from Uyo to Ikot Eyo. We were going to spend a few days with Daniel Essiet, a church leader who had invited us to visit his fourteen Mennonite congregations. In Africa all trekking experiences are unpredictable, exciting, and challenging, and we felt that this one might be doubly so.

The African bush had long intrigued us. Its dark green tangled growth seemed to invite us to penetrate its depth. Here and there a lone person may be seen forging his way through the thick growth by clearing a path for himself with the aid of a machete. It was much easier and safer to follow the paths and lorry roads which were already there. Our way to Ikot Eyo was through bush roads and paths. In Nigeria the main roads are good but few. The bush roads are narrow and unpredictable. There is nothing so disconcerting as travelling for ten miles only to come to a washed out bridge or one too dangerous to cross! Many of the bush paths can only be travelled on foot or by Nigerian taxi — the bicycle. The country is full of bicycles. We met them loaded with everything from three people to pigs and yams. Every little village had at least two or three bicycle repair shops.

Effiong, our busy boy helper, came with us to guide the way. Since he could speak pidgin English, our conversation sounded something like this: (Irene) "Effiong, didn't you bring me some oranges?" (Effiong) "Yes." (Irene) "You did bring oranges?" (Effiong) "No." And so we went "yesing" and "noing" until we understood that Effiong did not bring oranges. But we needed Effiong more than we didn't need him; so he came with us.

The plunge into jungle beauty was rewarding. Here one was close to the Creator. But here also were the forces of evil. We held our breath apprehensively as we met lone villagers armed with either guns or machetes. Our fear quickly became a laughing point as we passed more



I. U. Nsagak and his church in 1960.
Nsagak is secretary of the Nigerian Mennonite Church.

and more of them without incident. The machete, we learned later, is the most commonly used tool in Africa, practical for either warfare or farming. Anything that needs cutting can be severed by a machete, from the naval cord of a newborn baby to the giant forest tree. The people we met were likely farmers on their way to their fields.

In Nigeria land is ordinarily farmed one year and left idle for three. During this time it becomes an impenetrable wilderness, which must be cleared again after three years. To do this the farmer cuts down the bush and then burns the land in the dry season. Ashes and charcoal become the only fertilizer since there are no cattle in the area. The government recognizes this system of slash and burn as quite wasteful, but customs and traditions do not change easily. We too became aware of the waste when we returned one day to find our compound grass plus a mango and avocado tree burned brown. Then we wondered if some good American Mennonite farmer would not be interested in experimenting in better ways of farming.

With such reflections we came to Daniel's house in Ikot Eyo. The greetings were profuse and sincere. So were the gifts from our many hostesses — Daniel's wives: oranges, bananas, coconuts, eggs and papayas. Everyone within seeing and hearing distance was at the welcome. In no time at all they had our boxes and bundles on their heads and were carrying them to the room in Daniel's house where we were to stay.

Although we were their guests, we were also their curiosity. Their interest had many angles to it. They not only wanted to see what we ate but how we ate it. They not only wanted to see what we had on but how we put it on. The darkness was our only privacy, but even then a too loud giggle or snicker warned us that the darkness too had eyes.

All that first afternoon mothers came and went from our room. Some had painted faces, and others had tattoo or tribal markings. All of them had babies on their hips or backs or at their breasts. With Effiong's help we talked to them of "lesser things" so important to them: their farms, their children, their cooking, and their persistent quarrels among so many wives.

They were all Christian by name; yet so far were they from understanding the truth. We yearned to help them. Their simple faith had become a complexity, interwoven with age-old traditions of worship — worship of spirits and magic. "My baby cries constantly," said one mother. Her wee one clung to her breast in pain.

"And what is this for?" we asked, pointing to the cord which joined a bead in the baby's ear to a charm around its neck. She was silent. We should have known better than to ask. We were learning how much fear can govern the life of even a simple village woman.

Canoeing Down The Qua Iboe

"Tomorrow we go to a church thirty miles from here," Daniel had told us. At 7:30 the next morning we were off in a deluge of rain. Twenty-five miles, thirty miles through the bush, and yet we were not in sight of the church to which Daniel was taking us. Miles have a way of stretching in the jungle. We were nearing the marshy banks of the famous Qua Iboe river. Suddenly the wheels began to spin and we came to an abrupt stop. We would have to walk the rest of the way to the river.

"You stay here with the car," we directed Effiong. Of course we had no idea when we would return, but Effiong seemed to sense that it would not be a short time.

"No," he said, "I will not stay." At first we thought this to be another round of "yes" and "no," but then we realized that Effiong was in earnest. "I will not stay; they will make medicine out of me!"

The gory tales of medicine murder have long been handed down from one generation to another in Nigeria. Though such brutalities, as those one reads about in the long ago, are no more a reality today, to a lad away from his own village — even fifty miles away — among strange people, the fear can be very, very real. No amount of persuasion could convince Effiong to stay with the car. So we locked it up in faith and allowed Effiong to go with us.

We reached the river in the intensity of the midday sun. It can be cruelly hot near the equator. Then in the distance we saw a canoe with several oarsmen waiting alongside. The problem was how to get through the marsh to the canoe. Our problem was no problem for the oarsmen. One of them motioned for Ed to get on his back. Trustingly he rode piggyback to the canoe. "Not me," thought Irene. "I'd rather wade waist deep than to go that way." After a few protests she persuaded two of the men to make a chair for her with their hands.

For five miles we glided down the waters of the Qua Iboe river. We saw women in fishing boats taking their yams and peppers to the markets of neighboring villages. Far in the distance we could hear the roar of the ocean. Because its annual rainfall is over 130 inches, southeastern Nigeria is always green, beautiful and lush. Its river banks however are especially exquisite. Palms and ferns extend from the bank far out over the water. Here and there a tall palm tree spire is silhouetted against the deep blue sky.

Clinging to the river bank are miles and miles of the root mesh of mangrove trees, which adds an eerie appearance to the green beauty.

Above the roots are little platform houses, hanging precariously over the water from the tree branches. But fishermen manage well in such unsteady shelters.

"Not far now," Daniel announced. But we could see no place where a canoe could moor, to say nothing of a possible church site. We began to think of more piggyback and hand-chair rides. We were right. In the middle of a marsh we anchored the canoe, and after another struggling ride we set foot on a slick path. After three quarters of a mile of slipping and falling we came into a clearing.

From the shade of a palm tree a woman rose to greet us. She had been hemstitching a snow-white handkerchief. We soon discovered that she was the home economics teacher at a nearby Qua Iboe Mission Primary School. She greeted us warmly in perfect English. Slowly she led us through the pretty little village with its friendly people. As we went others kept joining our party. By the time we reached the little church in one corner of the village, practically everyone of the village was with us.

They had not known that we were coming, so they hurriedly prepared for a meeting while we waited and talked with the teacher. One man beat a drum to call any who had not already joined us; others swept out the church with brooms made of palm fronds; and the children ran to bring benches from their homes. No doubt these people wondered who we were and why we had come. We wondered why Daniel had brought us here!

The answer came when the service began. "Now here at long last is a white missionary from America," Daniel told the congregation. "He is here to do whatever you want him to do. If you want him to come once a week, he is 'cocksure' to come. If once a month, he will come once a month."

We were thinking: 75 miles from Uyo, a river trip, Qua Iboe church territory. . . . We had determined to go slow, but this called for quick action. Thus it was with a great deal of clarity and forcefulness that we countered Daniel's speech before the congregation. "We have not come to take over your church. Nor have we come to begin a new church and take away your members. Instead, we want you to remain members of your own church."

As the meeting ended, we were anxious to know what Daniel's attitude would be after such a rebuke. He was as friendly as ever. We sensed that this was not the first time something like this had happened to him. In fact, he may have even expected it.

By this time it was 3:30 p.m. and both food and water would have been welcomed. But there was still another church to visit, so we had to move on. With true Nigerian courtesy the villagers escorted us back to

the canoe. Their parting gift was fourteen "just ripe" bananas. We were seven in the canoe. The long, hot trip down the river, and through the bush to the car, seemed just a bit shorter.

The car clock pointed to 6:30 p.m. when we stopped once more at the door of yet another small church close to Daniel's home village. Knowing that we were coming, these people had been waiting for an hour and a half and did not seem discouraged at our lateness. This was Africa, and an hour or two didn't make that much difference.

We tied the bush lantern to the bamboo rafters and looked into the happy faces of people drumming, clapping, and singing with their whole bodies. This was a Mennonite church and Daniel was their leader. But how could a man lead a church who himself can neither read nor write, we reflected. Yes, we were glad we had come, even though by this time we were extremely thirsty.

The villagers here were as friendly as the others had been. Generously they gave us of their yams and fruit and in turn asked us for a hospital and school. "Please make your home in Ikot Eyo," they begged. "Let the Mennonite headquarters be here."

After a supper of water, bananas, beans, and more water, we had our baths in the dark and climbed under the mosquito net. We had gone a long, tiring way that day by car, in canoe and on foot. We also had come a long way in understanding our Mennonite bush churches.

That we were not the first missionaries to visit Daniel's fourteen churches, we knew. Nor would this be the first time Daniel would refuse to give up his old ways. "Why did you leave the Qua Iboe church?" we had asked his brother. "There is only one reason," he had replied. "They will allow us to have only one wife, and we need more in order to have enough to work on our farms." Several visits later we talked to Daniel, his brother and other church leaders about the problem: "We cannot accept you as leaders in our church because you have more than one wife. This is against the standard of the New Testament church to which we have all agreed. Send us a young man from your church to our Bible classes and we will teach him. He, then, can help you. We want to help you to be a strong church."

Fourteen churches, leadership prestige, many wives, ancient customs, these were too much for Daniel to give up. He just could not do it. He would get another missionary for his churches, one who would fit into his ways. And he did.

It was four days until Christmas. We headed back to Uyo and the children's letters. Once more we passed the sign, "Go Slow Through Uyo." This we had already done and it cost us fourteen churches. More than ever we believed this to be God's will for us as we went about discovering our churches in the Nigerian bush.

Sign of a "Healing Home."



CHIEF USUAH'S HEALING HOME

Why had these Eastern Nigeria independent churches so quickly turned Mennonite? The question plagued us from the day we arrived. All the congregations we met were far from our Mennonite beliefs. It seemed to us that pagan rites and practices were so interwoven with their worship that it was difficult for us to distinguish Christian from non-Christian.

Take, for example, the church of Chief Usuah of Ikot Ukon Itam. In this part of Africa chieftancy is not hereditary. Chief Usuah had been elected by the people. And he automatically became leader of the church he had formed in his village. There were, however, other churches in his village. We discovered that nearly all villages, depending on size, have from five to ten different churches (denominations) in them.

Chief Usuah had a healing home in connection with his church. The church was alongside his own large cement block dwelling. And around these were lines of several dozen connected mud huts occupied by patients who came to be healed. Healing homes were in general frowned upon by mission churches. This one had a flourishing business.

Some healing homes are reputed to be little more than worship centers for the pagan gods of fertility. Barren women, as desperate for children as women of the Old Testament times, come to such homes for "healing," and there, they fall easy prey to the "healers." Yet here was one connected with a Mennonite church that we had come to shepherd.

On a curiosity visit to Chief Usuah's healing home we suddenly, in one of the little houses in the back, came upon a freshly killed goat, likely a sacrifice to the god of fertility or to ancestors. Though we had had one glimpse into the religious life of a healing home, we knew that we might never find out many of its secret practices. And we also knew that such churches would not likely long remain a part of our group.

We talked to Chief Usuah about his healing home. But it was too flourishing a business for him to give up. He had mistakenly thought he could have the prestige that comes from belonging to a "good church," his pagan way of operating, and his many wives — all three at the same time. So we lost another congregation.

But we could not forget Chief Usuah's church. It taught us much for which we were grateful to the chief. We were rapidly learning the

problems we were facing in working with independent churches. Could they and would they ever change? We were thinking that if Chief Usuah would give us a young man from his congregation to train, we might continue to try to work with him and his people. But for this he was unwilling. Our experience with Usuah gave us understanding of the need and a deep yearning to develop a teaching program. We must try to help even such churches to a better understanding of Christian life and practice.

We also will not forget the demonstration of African church music and dance the church put on for us, before its break with the Mennonite Church. Mrs. Robert Kauffman, a Methodist missionary on her way to Southern Rhodesia to study African music stopped with us. She wanted to hear genuine African drumming. We knew just the place to take her: Chief Usuah's church!

The church gladly complied with the request. They drummed, they sang, and they danced with African abandon. They danced the dances of birth, of marriage, of the native festivals, and of death. Women danced; children danced; everyone danced. When the syncopated rhythm became too hypnotic, the leader called a halt only to begin something new.

The experience was exciting. We learned much about African religious life. The climax of the evening came when Mrs. Kauffman sang in her beautiful voice — in English, which many understood — the Negro spiritual, "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees." The audience was most appreciative.

Missionary For Sale

It was after times like this that we again raised the question that kept coming up in our minds: Why did these churches want to become Mennonites? We sensed a fear among them that we might want to leave them as other missionaries before us had done. We learned that many times previously they had joined some particular church which sent them missionaries, only to have them leave after a short time. We too wavered between going and staying. Our task seemed so impossible. It seemed to us at this time that they were merely wanting help with material things and not with what we at this time felt they were most needing. Missions stood for schools, training, jobs with salaries, prestige. A church with money could do things! And missionaries would make all this possible! They could then be like and have the same advantages as members of mission churches.

In Nigeria we discovered money buys churches. Many were the offers we had to turn down, not for the buildings, but for the members!

An unscrupulous missionary with the backing of an unscrupulous church in the homeland can carry on quite a business in church growth and development. We could easily and very quickly have hundreds of congregations and thousands of members at very little cost. Meanwhile the church at home, hearing of the extraordinary results, would be spurred on to even greater giving. But this would not build the true Church. This would only be "making" members, deceiving both ourselves and the people who called us to come and help them.

Missionaries too, we were to learn, and not only churches, were bought and sold. At least we discovered this was happening to us! Our sale price was two pounds and ten shillings (about \$7.00 in U.S. money). A church leader took us into a distant area along the coast where he said he had some congregations which wanted to join us. A date was set and the appointment kept. Somehow the churches did not appeal to us; we did not become "their missionary." So the group of churches did not keep their part of the secret agreement with the leader who promised to bring them a missionary for two pounds, ten. Naively, the leader gave the whole plot away by coming to us requesting that we help him get his money! After all he had done his part and he could not be blamed for our unwillingness to cooperate.

Early in our experience we did give our churches financial help by subsidizing their leaders. This small donation was given directly to each leader by the missionary. This kind of help was eagerly sought and considered merely symbolic of much more to come.

Word quickly spread that the Mennonite missionary was paying church leaders, and this brought a deluge of requests to us from all kinds of churches and leaders. It soon became evident that our leaders were expecting much more. To them this was a mere beginning — a down payment, so to speak. They hoped full-salaried leaders, hospitals, schools, and capital to run them, would soon follow. This was the familiar pattern so long used in mission churches.

We knew that somehow old missionary patterns had to be changed. But, even in a very young church this is difficult. With much prayer we took the initiative in forming an executive committee for our loosely organized church conference. The small budget for the support of church leaders was turned over to this committee to administer.

Although this first step towards an indigenous church was introduced by us, the missionaries, the next step came from the church itself. The executive committee set up a central fund, made up of the mission subsidy and congregation contributions. A plan for giving was formulated, including these points: (1) Each congregation cooperating with the conference to make a monthly contribution to the central fund of one pound (\$2.80); (2) all special offerings — communions,

baptisms, dedications, harvest festivals — to go to the central fund; (3) group contracts to be made whenever possible for labor, fruit, and land for the benefit of the whole church; (4) each local congregation to keep good records of its own local funds.

Independent Church Stewardship

This was the beginning of stewardship in our "Independent Mennonite Church." Though it did not work out ideally, some real progress was made. Proper financing is a problem in a new church in any country. We too were bound by many difficulties. But we were thankful that the plan was worked out by the church itself. We must try to be fair to our newly adopted church. They were seeking not only money and prestige. They wanted to be a good strong church. They were willing to pay the cost. They continued to work and cooperate with us, even if we did not follow the pattern of the Older Missions who came here a hundred years before us.

Many of the members of our churches had splintered off from the highly respected Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches. Reasons for a breakaway are many, including such factors as discipline, money and leadership. When members of the old, historic churches break away or separate to join or form independent churches they lose the prestige and benefits members of the former enjoy. Most of Nigeria's officials seem to be members of one or another of the older mission churches. Most of the independent churches were looked down on as uneducated and semi-pagan, with primitive practices. This loss of social acceptance is keenly felt. The independent churches, therefore, feel that foreign missions, any missions, can give the status and the things they need to make the kind of progress that gives status and acceptance. We are here speaking of all so-called splintered churches and not only of our own particular group.

With the new awakening in Africa, independent churches, too, are stirred with ideas of progress. In independent churches, too, there is a fierce determination to move forward with Africa. Young people want an education; they, too, with the rest of the world want salaries which will give them things others have. When we first got to Uyo the old mission churches said *ad nauseam* that if independent churches want help let them jolly well return to the churches from which they splintered. At this point we could not understand the reasons for the deep hatred of the independent churches for the mission churches; and the equally deep resentment of the mission churches for the

independent churches. We felt that somehow there must be two sides to the question. There must be some way to work and witness, even in Uyo!

A Pound And A Hen

After two years of work we still did not have an authentic list of the members of the Mennonite Church in Nigeria. At the Annual Conference in March, 1961 a strong appeal was made to have membership cards, as did all the larger churches. We decided this would be a good way to discover how many and who the members were. We were sure that everyone would want a card because a membership card was a prestige factor!

The cards were designed to teach the responsibility of members to the church. A signature confirmed their membership as well as their acceptance of a brief statement of faith and a promise to support the church with time, talent and money.

The experience of going about from congregation to congregation to help the leaders give out the cards was thrilling. We tried to see that the card was properly understood and signed; and a list made of those who received them. With much hilarity and hand-clapping there were promises to give "five shillings and 'an' hen," "a goat," or a "basket of palm fruit" to the church. One man promised "eight shillings and a hen." "Not the one with diarrhea!" shouted his neighbor, who apparently knew this man's propensity to give his worst to the Lord! But slowly our people were learning the meaning and responsibilities of the Christian life.

DISCOVERING THE MISSION CHURCHES

Day after day during our first weeks in Uyo we visited the bush churches who had so recently adopted the Mennonite name. Day after day requests for schools, hospitals, agricultural units, etc., multiplied. Ever increasingly, we found ourselves worshipping in small mud thatch churches in the very shadows of the larger church buildings of the established denominations. Day after day the confusion of our minds increased. To the Qua Iboe Mission especially we were only another transient group who would be short-lived in Nigeria. We could feel their displeasure at our having come, only to add to the existing confusion. We were being criticized by most of the established church leaders. Only a very few encouraged us. But we knew the seed of distrust had been sown and we felt its growing pressures. This was fertile soil in which to develop false opinions and still greater misunderstanding. Plagued by these thoughts we knew that we had to hear the story from leaders of the older churches. This then started us on a succession of interviews. We want to tell you what they said.

Asking And Listening

At the suggestion of Mr. Wood, Secretary of the Christian Council of Nigeria, we went first to see Mr. Graddon, Superintendent of the Qua Iboe Mission. We arrived in Etinan not knowing what to expect. The questions and fears in our minds were short-lived, however, for our host and hostess, the Rev. and Mrs. Graddon, veteran missionaries from the Emerald Isle, welcomed us with warmth and sincerity. A cup of tea, anywhere in the world, goes a long way to ease conversation. It was especially so that day, December 22, 1959. Conversation was soon moving easily. This was not the first time that Mr. Graddon had listened to a similar tale; nor was it the first time he had told his point of view.

He spoke thoughtfully, kindly, but very firmly. "Our aim from the beginning, when we founded our church in Nigeria, some sixty years ago," he said, "was to establish an indigenous church in the shortest time possible. Our church, then, is self-governing and self-supporting." He went on to explain that no church work is carried on with foreign funds. No national is paid with money from abroad. He told us also that all the Qua Iboe churches, and all the schools, with the exception of two, had been built by the nationals. We continued to listen as he



Mary Slessor (1848-1915), heroic, esteemed and beloved Scottish missionary, gave her life to the people of the Calabar region and beyond. Her body lies in a cemetery in Calabar, on a bluff overlooking the Cross River.

told of the groups which had come and gone. It was all very discouraging to us as we tried to find an open door in Nigeria. By lunch time we asked the question, "But surely Mr. Graddon, there must be room somewhere for us to work in this field?" He replied, "No, I am afraid not. To come in now only adds to the confusion, which already exists. I deeply sympathize with you. You are in a very difficult situation, and I would not like to be in your place."

We confirmed then that we had neither any intentions of starting a competitive work, nor of proselyting. We ventured a suggestion of cooperative work in order to dissolve confusion rather than to add to it.

Mrs. Graddon served us ground-nut stew for lunch, a truly delightful dish, and we all relaxed in more casual conversation. As we left Mr. Graddon said, "When God has called, one is seldom, if ever, in the wrong place." We left with some hope.

Our travels took us to the Salvation Army headquarters in Akai, a little village down near the ocean. Not so far away is the fishing village of Ibino, at the mouth of the Qua Iboe river. On the bank of this river stands the very first Qua Iboe church. The church bell still calls the villagers to worship morning and evening. We happened by there one evening in time to hear the bell and see the old pastor walking with a cane to the church.

We met the officers of the Salvation Army. Among them was Captain Margaret Moore, the principal of the secondary school at Akai. She possessed an amazing personality, with contagious optimism, dogged courage, and a flint-like faith, which could cut through mountains of difficulty and discouragement. She was among the pioneers of the Salvation Army work in Akai. No one could question the merits and high standards of her school in that little village down by the sea. As we talked she deplored the confusion of the churches in East Nigeria. As she spoke, and one couldn't help but listen with every part of oneself, we thought, "Well, why, what makes you stay here?" She told us of their mistake in coming in through the back door of the Qua Iboe Mission, and that they were still reaping the results of a bad beginning. Again we thought, "Why, why? What makes you stay here and keep on. What is it that has linked you so deeply to these people of Akai?" She told us of the young people of her school:

"There is in this part of Nigeria, and I think elsewhere, a desperate reaching out towards the future, an unshakable faith that the future will be good, a throbbing hope for a new day. It is sometimes their blind belief that more schools, more political conventions, more zinc roofs will insure prosperity, and guarantee happiness and freedom. Here, in this

tremendous striving and wishful hoping, in the mixture of their eagerness and desire I have found my place. There is unbelievable frustration springing from the lack of resources, and from the dreaming of large dreams in small places. But in spite of disappointments I know that this is my place and task."

If at any time in the beginning months there was a turning point in our own thoughts to a positive and possible future, it took place at the close of this unforgettable visit. If this was possible in the schools, then it was also possible in the churches. We left Akai and Captain Moore with the strengthening thought that with God's help and guidance we would work to dissolve the confusion rather than adding to it.

"Why don't you call on Mr. Macdonald, the Secretary of the Christian Council of East Nigeria? He is very understanding," said Captain Moore as we left. This then was our next interview.

More Asking And More Listening

It is a long hard pull from the Okopodi Market in Itu to the site of the famous leper colony at the top of the hill. We stopped at the entrance arch to take a picture and to look out over the beautiful Cross River. From where we stood we could see the island where the leper colony was first started. On the archway were the words, "In His Name." From here on all the buildings of the colony were painted a deep red — beautiful in the setting of green palms.

We could hear the trill of the Scottish "r" as Mrs. Macdonald hurried down the stone steps to meet us. There was no opportunity for any strangeness with the Macdonalds. A Scotch scone, a cup of coffee, and soon the trilled r's, our own broad r's, mingled with the soft English r's, and all fell into place. We were among friends. It was easy to pour out our concerns to attentive and responsive listeners; and it was easy to accept the straightforward questions which Bob Macdonald put to us. "What was our stand on polygamy? What was our Mennonite doctrine? What had we done in India? Why were we here and not there? All these questions and many more he asked us. We are still amazed that in an initial visit we told him so much. Perhaps by this time we were more sure that a cooperative venture of trying to pull the independent churches together was the only way we could work.

Whatever it was, we left with Mr. Macdonald promising to do all he could to help us, even to calling the Eastern Region Council Committee to help advise us. Oh yes, and he even offered to help us find a more suitable place to live. All the way home these words, "Find a more

suitable place to live, a more suitable dwelling place," was sweet music to our ears. As the cool breeze of the Nigerian night rustled through the palms, we wrote in our diary, "It's full moon tonight. God's in His Heaven; all's right with the world."

Our hopes which had soared so steadily came down with a mighty crash after the meeting with the representative church leaders of the Eastern Region Council. We came home from that meeting deflated. And so it was that we cabled the Board: "Results of meeting very unfavorable for developing Uyo program. Council voluntarily suggested development of open middle belt in Nigeria and other areas." The next weeks were weeks of testing, waiting and listening. There seemed to be no room for us.

The mills of the gods grind slowly. This was still true. Once again, after several renewals, our visitor's visa was reaching another time limit. Finally, the government refused permission to our Mission Board to work in this country. Only one course seemed open to us. We would have to go to Lagos, 500 miles west, for a personal interview with the immigration officers.

chapter five

THE MARY SLESSOR MISSION INVITES US

It was February 1960; a new year had started. The synod of the Presbyterian Church was holding its annual meeting in historic Calabar on the banks of the Cross River.

They came from Arochuku, the home of the Long Juju; from Itu where the world-famous leper colony is located; and from points north and south, far into the interior on both banks of the river. This was a very important year for the Scottish Presbyterian Mission. It was integrating with the church to become the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. We were invited to the meeting.

"Mr. and Mrs. Weaver are Mennonite missionaries, representing the Mennonite church in America and were sent out by the Mennonite Mission Board." Mr. Macdonald was introducing us to the members of Synod. It was clear that they were hearing this name Mennonite for the first time. Many shook their heads to say, no. We could not blame them. After all they didn't know who we were. One old grey haired minister, sitting in the front section of the church, smiled and nodded his head in acceptance. We shall always remember him with appreciation for this. We were there only briefly. The Synod meeting continued and we came on back to Uyo.

"We will stop with you in Uyo on our return," said the Sommervilles and the Macdonalds, as the ferry left Calabar.

For an hour and a half we ferried down the waters of the famous Cross River — so important in the history of the Scottish Presbyterian Church and Mission. On its banks and in through the forests lie the centers for churches, hospitals and schools. The ferry whistle sounded and the pilot steered the boat to the east bank of the river, skirting the fishing boats just ahead of us. Here and there among the mangrove roots, which extended out into the water, were shelters for tired fishermen — crude little platforms tied precariously into the branches of the trees. Below was a landing pole where they could tie their boats. Any traveller on this waterway for the first time, awed by the exquisiteness of the scenery, always asks this question, "What, what can be beyond the swamp, this impenetrable swamp?" And yet, through such marshes and jungles, by canoe and on foot, braving the heat, mosquitoes, and every other danger, the early missionaries went with the **Good News**. Today we travel by steam launch in comfort.

We must confess that our minds seemed to reflect the density of the jungle's banks on either side of us. What could be beyond and how could we find a way through the tangled mesh of uncertainties in which we found ourselves. Yet there was the slightest ray of light. Had we not been invited to the Synod meeting? Had not Mr. Macdonald said, "Surely there is some work in which you could help us?" Leaving the ferry we went home in the Morris Oxford, which had by this time become so much a home for us. We came back to wait.

"We know not what awaits us,
God kindly veils our eyes,
And o'er each step of our onward way
He makes new scenes to rise."

New Scenes

Archibong, Effiong's friend, was securely tying a box to the back of the cycle. In it he would put two empty kerosine tins. He had to go three and a half miles for water. This was Archibong's special job. He was the water boy.

"Hurry," we said, "strangers are coming this morning. We will need plenty of water for washing and for coffee." Strangers? At least to Archibong, anyone who was not an uncle, or brother, or cousin, or aunt, was a stranger; he was not a part of the family. He wasn't a guest, he was a stranger. To us these stranger guests were friends.

They came: the Macdonalds, the Sommervilles and Miss Russell, missionaries from Scotland; Mr. Iso, the Educational Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria; Mr. Otisi, an educational leader; and others. Our compound all of a sudden took on a look of importance, with three Landrover cars and a few other vehicles parked in front of the house. There was coffee and laughter; more coffee and more laughter. Everyone was feeling good. Synod was over. The conversation shifted to Abiriba.

Years before, the missionaries told us, the Presbyterian church had a hospital in Abiriba. The first doctor to work there was Sir Francis Ibiam, the present Governor of Eastern Nigeria. For ten years Dr. Ibiam, still an elder in the Presbyterian church, spared nothing in order to give the hospital a good start. Having sacrificed a great deal for this venture he became very attached to it. As great as was his joy, so keen also was his disappointment when he was transferred to another place. The hospital was then closed for lack of personnel. All that remained of the hospital through the years was a County Council dispensary controlled by the Government.

"Now," said Mr. Sommerville, "the community is again determined to have a hospital. They have raised 11,000 pounds for buildings and the Government has matched this amount. They have also promised an extra 20,000 pounds if the community is able to find a voluntary agency to run it. We are wondering if your Board would be interested in assuming this responsibility. We simply do not have the personnel." This was now a beginning. Mary Slessor's church was asking us to share in a work with them. Could we? Should we present such a proposition to our Mission Board?

A few days later a group of us travelled the 80 miles north of Uyo to Abiriba, the site of the new hospital. Late in the afternoon of that day a number of us gathered in the front compound: Mr. Uche, Mr. N. A. Otisi, Mr. K. Kalu, another Mr. Otisi and Mr. Sommerville were with us. As the sun slipped down behind the hill we paused to ask God's guidance. We all together asked Him to open or close the door according to His plan and purpose for us.

The warmth and the sincerity of the invitation lingered with us as we returned home. Back in Uyo we closed our doors to the darkness of the night and went to the prayer room. On the whitewashed wall we had written the now familiar words of II Chronicles 20:12b. The light of the lantern brought it into focus: "We do not know what to do but our eyes are upon Thee."

THIS IS LONG DISTANCE

As the Presbyterian Church was opening doors of service to us, the Nigerian Government was closing the door to our staying in the country. Only one alternative remained. We would personally present our case to the Chief Immigration Officer in Lagos.

"You have only a visitor's visa," the government official said. "We will give you no further extension. You must leave the country within 24 hours or assure us that you will work in cooperation with one of the recognized mission bodies of the Uyo area."

The atmosphere in that little office in the Immigration Office building in Lagos suddenly became tense and uncertain. The emergency of the situation demanded immediate decisions, which we could not make. Even to have a cabled reply from the Board would require more than 24 hours.

"Please, grant us 48 hours," we asked of the official. "We will give you our reply after calling the Mission Board in America."

Life on the streets of Lagos moved lazily by. The photographers, thinking that we needed passport pictures came soliciting our patronage. The hawkers, perspiring from long hours in the sun, pushed their wares before us. Watches, shoestrings, combs, soap, ladies underwear, bananas, books: all cheap, all were for us, they said. Everything was for us today, cheap — all except permission to work in Nigeria.

As we walked to the car, thinking, praying, wondering, the words of John Baillie's prayer best describe our feelings. "O God above us, let us take refuge in the thought that Thou art utterly beyond us; beyond the sweep of our imagination, beyond the comprehension of our minds; Thy judgments being unsearchable and Thy ways past finding out."¹ Forty-eight hours...forty-seven hours...forty-six hours....

In the late hours of the afternoon, down along the Marina in Lagos we counseled with Mr. Wood, Secretary of the Christian Council in Nigeria and a very humble servant of the Lord. His years of experience and keen understanding must have encouraged many a newcomer to West Africa. He did not chart a way for us, but we left feeling that we had been with someone who understood.

¹ John Baillie, *Prayers*.

" 'No one has lived here for over five years,' Mrs. Macdonald was saying." (page 37)



It was 2:45 p.m., May 5, 1960. In just one hour we would be making our transoceanic telephone call to Elkhart. Over and over we read the message which we wanted to give to the Board. For several hours that morning, seated on the cement ledge outside Kingsway Department Store in busy downtown Lagos, we had written and rewritten what we wanted to say. We asked God to give us His answer through the Board. "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee."

The telephone rang. "London calling New York. New York — Elkhart."

London operator: "Mennonite Board at 1711 Prairie Street, please."

Elkhart Office: "Good morning, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities."

Operator: "Overseas call for J. D. Graber."

Elkhart Office: "J. D. Graber is not in the office. He can be contacted at the Atlantic Hotel in Chicago."

London operator to Ed: "Your party is not in the office. Shall I contact him in Chicago?"

Ed: "Yes, please."

London operator: London — New York — Chicago — Atlantic Hotel "Overseas call for J. D. Graber."

Joe Graber: "Hello."

Ed: "Hello Joe, this is Ed calling from Nigeria. I am in Lagos."

Joe: "Well this *is* long distance."

We talked 10 pounds worth, in Nigerian currency. We hastily told our story. In that time all distance seemed to dissolve. We gave no thought to the mechanics of the call. We forgot all about the operator, who connected us. We even forgot our carefully prepared words. We were waiting for guidance. The "Operator" above would tell us! We talked; Joe listened. Joe talked; we listened. Joe with characteristic deep understanding began to counsel us. Finally he said, "Go ahead, accept the proposal of the Presbyterian Church. By all means plan to stay."

A HOUSE FROM SCOTLAND

This was it, the old Presbyterian mission house down by the stream. As we turned off the road between the palm trees, we could see it. "Noah's ark must have looked like that," we thought. School boys from the nearby primary school immediately surrounded the car. A boy doing his laundry by the old cistern in the back compound left off pounding his clothes and joined the group. We greeted the teachers from the surrounding villages while Mr. Macdonald tried first one key, and then the other, on the front and back doors. At the sound of the key turning in the lock, we remembered what Mr. Macdonald had said: "I'll try to find you a house, a more suitable house to live in." This was it.

The outside stairway which led to the living apartment above was long and steep. We climbed slowly and looked out over the compound which sloped down to the stream. "No one has lived here for over five years," Mrs. Macdonald was saying. "I have no idea what to expect."

A house shut up for a week in Nigeria can take on strange sights and smells. The dampness seems to penetrate through every crack. This had not been occupied for five years. Regardless of first impressions, we felt it was right for us to move here and to live among these people. Sincerely and warmly the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries were officially offering this home to us. We wanted to come. A few weeks later we moved to Ikot Inyang.

There were many things about this move which we did not understand, but Effiong, who was still with us was perplexed about something which had not occurred to us. How could Mennonites be living in a Presbyterian house? "Madam," said Effiong, one day, "What will we be now, the Mennonite Church of Scotland?"

The tall fair-haired German lad was leaving. "Thank you for all you have done for us," we said to him. We looked together at the clean walls, the painted door and window frames, the patched floor boards, at the yellow paint of the outside walls. "Well, I like it," he said. "You like it?" he questioned. We nodded. "Then everyone too will like it." Werner Knorr, the young evangelical missionary had become part of our family.

We would never again have a home so romantic as this. Its sawn lumber came all the way from Scotland in the long ago. All along the

front side of the building the walls opened up to the out-of-doors, like window awnings. Nothing to stop the slightest breeze from entering. Nothing too, to keep out the winged insects of the night. The friendly geckos, forty and fifty strong, kept us company every night after the lights were lit. They moved up and down the walls, darting here and there after the bugs and moths that swarmed about the lights. We learned to love them. The hills, and the stream in the valley, the palm trees silhouetted against the sky in the moonlight, or swaying in the morning breeze — who could ever forget the scene? This was our live picture window. This was the country of Mary Slessor. Only five miles away a cairn marks the site of her last home before she died. Back of the marker the cement foundation of her home, which has long since fallen down, still marks out the boundary of her simple dwelling.

To our home came the evangelists and pastors of the Presbyterian village churches and schools. Missionaries from England and Scotland, from Ireland and Wales, from Australia and New Zealand and America stopped with us from time to time. Our circle of acquaintances among them grew from a few to over a hundred. They came from the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Apostolic, Salvation Army, Pentecostal Assemblies, World Christian Crusade, The Church of God, Church of Christ, Sudan Interior Mission and Qua Iboe Missions. We shared with them our experiences of India, and they taught us much about Africa. Doors were opening up to us to help in hospitals and schools. We eagerly looked forward to the coming of colleagues.

Now, We Are Not Alone

It was a happy day when early in October of 1960 we went to Port Harcourt to meet the Dr. John Grasse family from Blooming Glen, Pennsylvania. We had been looking forward to the time when others would join us in Nigeria. It was almost like preparing for Christmas. Archibong eagerly joined in the excitement of making room for a family of five to live with us for a few weeks. Nothing seemed too much. Even our friends shared our enthusiasm and offered to loan us extra equipment which we might need. We brought in supplies of rice and flour and sugar from the shops in Uyo twenty miles away. A new bunch of bananas hung ripening on the back verandah. The orange basket was overflowing with fruit from the local market. After all, there were no supermarkets. More tins of powdered milk, more yams, another double mosquito net, two more buckets for bath water: these and other items we added to our supply. We hoped this was just the beginning of many more colleagues coming to Nigeria. It was the

beginning of an exciting adventure for us, and for those who came through the next few years.

We learned from the start not to be disappointed when people coming by plane, did not arrive on the day they had written that we should expect them. It happened when John and Betty and their three little daughters arrived and many times after that. To meet someone at the airport was so exciting and so much fun that we never tired of making the trip twice.

What a meeting! While waiting for their baggage, we tried to get fresh news from Blooming Glen. Sandy, the youngest, had no strange feelings at all. She accepted her surroundings matter-of-factly, and made herself at home in the crowd. The bright colors of the women's head scarves delighted her. But all of a sudden we lost Sandy. When we found her up near the bar, she was looking intently into the face of a whiskered passenger. She was fascinated; and he obviously was delighted. Oh for the grace and ease with which little children accept and adjust to others!

The coming of colleagues from America was not only a joy for us. Friends we had met in the mission churches round about Uyo were also sharing our excitement. Vivian Nelson, from the Pentecostal Mission, and living twenty-two miles away from us, wanted to share in something for the welcome lunch. She made ginger cookies for the children. It was something special for all. We sat around the little iron tables on the enclosed sidewalk alongside Kingsway Department Store, and had a picnic lunch before going on to our home in Ikot Inyang.

The three weeks which followed were hard weeks. Weeks of traveling back and forth from Abiriba over bad roads in hot humid weather. Weeks of collecting household and hospital furnishings. Weeks of adjustment. Many, many months later, John admitted to us, that on his initial visit, he thought Abiriba to be the most God-forsaken place in the world in which to open a hospital. Pioneering a hospital program in Nigeria was rugged in comparison to directing the established medical program in Puerto Rico, from which they had come.

A month later Cyril and Ruth Gingerich came from Canada to help on the hospital staff. Again, because of delays in Lagos, we made the trip twice on two consecutive days to meet them. We were now six missionaries! The burden was still lighter for us; but the problems of building and operating the Abiriba hospital in Iboe-land appeared colossal to the workers there. The eagerness of the community to have a hospital did not wholly dissolve the problems and disappointments which came to the missionaries during those first months. Cyril and Ruth stayed with us for two weeks before going to John and Betty in Abiriba. Archibong was learning to keep the fruit baskets full with fruit

from the local market. A bunch of ripening bananas hung on the back verandah. Our neighbor knew that we would buy as many eggs as she could find in the village. Things looked brighter now. We were not alone. We knew that others would be coming also. Before too long, Martha Bender, from Kalona, Iowa, and Nelda Rhodes, from La Junta, Colorado, came to help on the nursing staff. The hospital grew and soon the church was urging that they be allowed to send girls to Abiriba for nurses' training.

One day we took to the hospital two members of the Nse Itam church, near Uyo. One was an elderly woman, a bit of broken humanity. We saw her comfortably settled in the women's ward. Iniunam, one of our local church leaders from Itam, was the other. He was admitted for surgery. Though the hospital was some eighty miles away, they felt that this hospital in Iboe-land belonged to them. We walked through the maternity ward. Cuter babies you never saw with their little curly tops and cradled close to their mothers. We went on to the new operating theater. We remembered, at the dedication of the new hospital in January, 1961, hearing Sir Francis Ibiam tell of the struggling beginning when he was the first doctor. We thought of our own struggles only a year ago; and we said in our hearts, "O God, how good You are."

Very shortly the government opened the way for a rural health program in the Abiriba area. This answer to prayer gave us a tremendous opportunity to witness in the villages surrounding Abiriba. But it would be impossible, without more help. We wondered if there were no doctors and nurses from the church in America who would come to help make a rural health program possible? Dr. Grasse has been given just one year to find personnel for the program. Will not the church at home respond?

Not only was the hospital needing help but many schools wanted teachers also. Dan and Carrie Diener from Elkhart, Indiana, first came in response to this need and went to Calabar. High on the banks of the Cross river, in old Calabar, is the grave of Mary Slessor. Royalty coming from England never fails to honor the memory of this simple village girl from Scotland who did so much for the people of Eastern Nigeria. The whole world knows of Mary Slessor. Dan and Carrie found themselves located not far away from her grave site at a secondary school in Duke Town.

Dan had his low moments when he pondered the position he had left at Penn High School to come to Calabar. He found that he had to do more than teach mathematical equations. To help clear the bush on the new location of the school was also a part of his assignment, as it was for every teacher. This was hard to understand and certainly not

Western reasoning. "Come all this way, and spend all this money to clear the bush?" This was most frustrating. But Dan found, as time went on, and he became more and more involved with the people, that these seemingly unrelated jobs become most significant as bridges to meaningful relationships.

To ride with Dan in his little VW after a specially trying day was an unforgettable experience. If only bridges could speak! The weak ones, the slippery ones, the improvised ones, all knew his speed: high speed for all! They were all kind to him, and he got over each one — wet or dry — safely. A certain road between Okigwe and Abiriba will always be famous for the name which Dan gave to it: "The Jericho Road." No explanation ever needs to be given to anyone who enquires about it. Its name speaks for itself.

More teachers came. To evaluate a teacher placement program, the Board sent Dr. Glen Miller of Goshen College for one year. Lois and Cliff Amstutz from Hesston, Kansas, came to the Teacher Training College in Afikpo, about one hundred miles north of Uyo; Cecil and Judy Miller came to develop an Agricultural Program near Uyo. They lived in a house built by the villagers, in a plot back of the Ikot Obio Ama church.

A door has opened and we have entered. Perhaps this is the real beginning of *The Uyo Story*.

A MUD HOUSE IN THE BUSH

Walking along on the crest of a ridge at the edge of a deep valley with I. U. Nsasak, the Secretary of the church, we came upon an open clearing. We were in full view of many valleys and ridges far beyond us, all in a most gorgeous setting. And between, in the valley below, hidden in deep rain-forest bush, flowed a beautiful stream, originating only a short distance away in a large spring gushing from the hillside. The stream was sufficiently large to supply water for both the Ikot Obio Ama and Ikot Ada Idem villages and it was here the church went for immersion baptism services. Not far away from the spring was a sacred grove where ancient tribal rites and secret ceremonies are still practiced and hidden from the uninitiated. We were warned never to enter the grove! But the view on the ridge is breathtaking.

We turned to Nsasak and said, "If we wanted to build a house here on this beautiful ridge, would your village give us land? Would they give labor and materials from their bush to build a house for missionaries?"

We could hardly have said anything to please him more. This was what the churches had been wanting from the very beginning — a missionary to come and live with them. He enthusiastically assured us that Ikot Obio Ama, his village, would not only give land and anything we needed from the bush: trees, palms, bamboo, but also free labor to help build the house. So the vision of a mud house for missionaries was born.

We made a proposal to the Mission Board. I. U. Nsasak called together the chiefs and the people of the village to talk it over. Land in all of Africa is a very delicate question. In Nigeria expatriate persons or organizations may only lease land, never buy it. This was communal land we were bargaining for. We needed the consent of the whole village. A number of different churches in the village were involved, including a Catholic church. The village was happy and entirely willing for missionaries to come and live with them. The Nsasak family carries much weight in the village. The father, now deceased, was the founder of the Government Teacher Training College in Uyo.

In the agreement all cash expenses would be the mission's; materials and unskilled labor would be the responsibility of the village. But Ikot Obio Ama village is small. Much work was involved. Why not invite all the six nearby congregations of the area to join in? When proposed the



House mudding.

other six congregations enthusiastically joined in the project. The completed house for missionaries would from the beginning, become the property of the church. The mission had no agreement legally written up for anything they could claim. It would be the church's property from the beginning.

Men, women and children came for miles for many days from the six congregations to clear the land, to bring sticks and bamboo poles from the bush and sand from the stream in the valley. The land we had chosen was a quarter of a mile from the village. There was no motorable road. One had to be built. The villagers cut down the trees and leveled the land for a quarter mile of virgin road leading down to the place we wanted to build a house for missionaries. Our British Morris Station Wagon was the first car that ever traveled on that road.

Over 150 people came together for the "mudding" of the house. They had to dig the earth, bring water from the stream, make the bamboo frame for the walls and roof, plaster the walls, mat the roof, and do all the innumerable other things that go into the making of a mud house in Africa. The villagers completed their work. Only the cementing of the floors and walls remained. That and the dedication would wait. The house was not modern; the roof swayed; the walls curved. But it was their house; they built it. The time for celebration had come. We bought a pig and plenty of garri to make fufu. They brought the palm wine, without which there could not be a proper celebration. The women cooked the food. A feast was enjoyed by all.

The mud house was a symbol of what was happening. It reveals, better than we can tell, the new sense of unity and the growing organization of the church. It stands as a symbol of mutual trust and confidence.

A Young People's Retreat

Sixty eager, happy young people formed a circle in front on the newly built mud house at Ikot Obio Ama to play games and to enjoy a last fellowship meal together. They came from scattered bush churches as far as fifty miles away. This was the third vacation-time retreat. What a contrast to only two years before, when we had just arrived. Then our young people seemed so few. Mission churches had crowds of young people. One of the beautiful sights so commonly seen driving down bush roads on any Sunday morning were the crowds of children and young people, beautifully dressed, on their way to a service in one of the mission churches. They have the schools; therefore, they have the young people too. This was the strategy in all mission churches.

The strategy worked. Young people are desperately eager to have an education. There is no price too great to pay for the chance. Young Africans easily accept cultural and religious change. To change from being a Catholic to a Protestant, or from a Protestant to a Catholic church, is no problem. They will go to the church where the best educational opportunities are offered them. So we feel that a change of religion is on a very superficial basis. This is a problem all mission churches will have to face more realistically. One is forced to ask: do they really give up their past religious beliefs and practices?

Religious and cultural change is coming too fast for older people. They cannot so easily change their patterns of thought and way of life. So we found most of the independent churches full of older people and small, preschool age children. The mission churches had the young people.

The church looking to the future must give special attention to its young people. We had no schools. There seemed to us to be both primary and secondary schools readily available for all children and young people. Availability of finance seemed to us to be a much greater problem than availability of schools. At this late hour in missions, building of schools did not seem to us to be the right strategy for Uyo. If we had come to Uyo at the time of the early missions, we too would have built schools. But now even the old missions will likely have to turn over their schools to the Government in a very few years. The handwriting is already on the wall.

Real progress in the church, we felt, was dependent on working closely with and winning the confidence of the young people. Very early they organized themselves into a Youth Christian Fellowship. This was a good beginning. There were able leaders among them. About all they needed was a bit of encouragement. They did the rest. More than anything else, young people in Africa want an education. But we had no schools of our own; and no plans to develop any! How could we help them to an education? The problem is not solved just by setting up schools. The great majority of the young people simply did not have the money to go to a secondary school. Throughout the area many parents could not afford the clothes and books and fees for even a primary education for their children. Higher education is completely out.

Young people need an education. The church needs trained young people. Without them the church has little chance of making progress. Out of this background we developed a scholarship plan for the training of young people who could qualify. We still think that this was one of the best things we could have done for the church, as well as for the

young people. Very early the wisdom of giving scholarships to certain young people was amply verified. There were problems, but no program, however good, is without problems. In initiating the plan we gave scholarship help to about a dozen young people (mostly young men).

One of the requests in each of the first three church-wide conferences was for a Bible School. They were entirely right in giving high priority to the need for a Bible School. The key to the progress of a church is the level of its spiritual leadership. Almost all the men conducting services in the local congregations were untrained men — and in some cases illiterate. This can generally be said of all “separatist churches.” Untrained, illiterate, unscrupulous leaders may well be one of the reasons for the many splintered churches. It was encouraging that our churches understood their greatest need.

From the very beginning we were holding Bible and monthly leaders’ training classes. This was a help, but not nearly enough. We started sending a few of the young leaders to Bible training colleges. They are already coming back and filling a significant place in the life of the church. From among our young people we need many more trained, dedicated leaders. We were early looking forward to a training school of our own in response to both the young people and the church.

OUR TASK

“Go to the middle belt, somewhere between the Muslim Northern and Eastern Regions; or, go to some other place where there are not so many missions already; go anywhere, but not Uyo,” we were told at the outset by mission church leaders. “There is hardly breathing space in Uyo.”

We knew what they were telling us was true. We were in historic mission country. Here the people have had the Gospel for over a hundred years. Over 95 percent of the people consider themselves Christian. Still, new missions keep coming in before our very eyes, from anywhere, from everywhere, asking no questions, acting as if there had never been any mission work done by Mary Slessor, Samuel Bill, and a host of other missionary heroes and martyrs. We could see for ourselves that “new missions” could really capitalize on the religiously confused Uyo situation.

We could understand the resentment and prejudice, so strongly felt by church leaders of the older established missions. In the Uyo area especially the Qua Iboe and the Scottish Presbyterian missions had suffered greatly by the coming of additional Western missionaries who were merely adding to the confusion. Mission churches were naturally sensitive to the coming of others.

Uyo is full of “splintered churches” (the name sometimes given to the hundreds and hundreds of independent “Bush Churches” of Eastern Nigeria) variously called “prophet movements,” “independent churches,” “separatist churches.” Perhaps the best name now being used is “Independent Churches.”

Most of the “Independent Churches” are loosely banded together in groups from five to a hundred congregations. Some have less and some have even more than this. Each has its own leader and name of which they are proud. Somewhere in the beginning of their religious pilgrimage they have splintered off from one or another of the mission churches. But they go on splintering and changing their religious affiliation, sometimes changing only slightly their practices and forms of worship. Each time they take on a new name. But they are independent! And they are indigenous — at least more so than the mission churches from which they have originally splintered.

Reasons for this splintering are many and varied, such as: polygamy, money, politics, discipline, and the desire for leadership and control. In some countries of Africa racism and nationalism seem to have been strong motives for "separatism" and the formation of independent churches. But in Eastern Nigeria these do not on the surface seem to be such important issues. With our little experience and limited understanding we are hardly in a position to evaluate what really is happening. At this point we are inclined to feel that there are two sides to the question. We must listen to what the mission churches are saying to us. But we must also try to understand more deeply the reasons for what is happening in the Church in Uyo.

Conflict

We are deeply involved in the conflict of Uyo. The churches we came to help are somewhere between the more orthodox and the more pagan of the separatist churches — so it seems to us at this point. They certainly would not be accepted by the mission churches as true Christian churches. Some of them practiced semi-magical healing rites, animal sacrifices, and other rites coming out of or related to their animist background. The worship of some of the congregations was composed mostly of singing of spiritual songs with drumming and dancing.

We rather quickly learned that the mission churches did not permit the singing of spiritual songs and drumming and dancing in their worship services! Since we, too, came from a "mission church" (for twenty years we served in the church in India), Uyo independent churches posed a real problem for us. We fear our sympathies were very much on the side of the mission churches. But we came to work with an independent church. We have, somehow, to try and understand how they feel and what they want. How can we understand them? How can we work with them? How can we really accept them? It is so much easier to work in the old type mission church and organization; so much easier to control things. This called for so much adjustment and change in our way of thinking and relating. Will we ever be able to make it?

The religious pilgrimage of "our" churches was little different from that of hundreds of others here around Uyo. Previous to our coming they have had other sponsoring "separatist missions." We have not sufficiently compared our Western "separatist" churches with those of Africa. This would help us. Our fifty congregations were loosely organized around a few leaders, some of whom were illiterate

polygamists. They came together on one principle. They wanted a missionary who would come and do for them what other foreign missions had done for the mission-established churches. It was clear they wanted to be accepted; they wanted the respectability that makes this possible. They wanted schools; they wanted hospitals; and they wanted a Bible school — all this and much more. All these things they could have had by uniting with one of the many good mission churches already working in the area.

Let this be stated clearly: the problem of the African separatist churches is **not** doctrinal. Any such understanding would indeed be naive.

Reconciliation

The Uyo church situation is full of division, resentment, and bitterness. Unfortunately the resentment is two-sided. We frequently hear the statement from the leaders of the historic churches: "If they want help, let them come back; let them repent and we will gladly help them." But there is little attempt to help the separatist churches except on their own terms. It is clear that the splintered, independent churches will never come back to their original parent bodies. They are too full of resentment and bitterness.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that the separatist churches do not want help; or that they do not want the fellowship of a wider circle of Christians; or that they are closed to efforts of reconciliation. But the one thing that they seem most determined to have is their spiritual freedom!

Our position as a new mission coming in was most difficult and embarrassing. We certainly were not interested in adding to the religious confusion that already existed. Neither were we interested in taking this opportunity to proselyte thousands of members for the Mennonite Church. We were between two fires, each one sufficiently hot to make us uncomfortable until we did something about it.

One of the thrilling things that is happening in our day is the breaking down of old, old walls separating people from people. Walls cause suspicion and fear, even resentment and hatred.

But walls separating people are crumbling, while bridges of reconciliation are uniting people everywhere. We rejoice at every effort of reconciliation. We believe that this coming together of Christian people to seek new ways of relating and understanding each other is a movement of the Spirit of God in our day. It is **not** brought about by committees, organizations, or conferences.

Though we believe better interchurch and interdenominational relationship is God's will for the Church, we are not telling the *Uyo Story* to promote ecumenical relationships. We do, however, very strongly believe that effective ecumenicity must begin at the grass roots. It is first here where interchurch relationships must be made strong. Uyo has forever cured us from the prejudices and egotism of denominationalism as it often has been practiced by missions on foreign fields. We wish to express a deep conviction that in a so-called Christian area, such as Uyo, bridges of fellowship and better understanding between churches need urgently to be built on the level of the village church, where Christians live and work together. Mission churches, too, have not yet solved all their problems of interrelationship. Some old bridges need mending; new ones need building.

When we first came to Uyo some difficult decisions faced us. Should we accept at face value the things our recently accepted Mennonite leaders were telling us? Or should we accept the interpretations given us by the leaders of mission churches? We were caught in a cross fire. Mission churches were saying: "get out." Separatist churches of many kinds were saying: "Come in. Help us. We need a missionary."

Could we really help these independent churches and disregard, or compete with the long-established mission churches? Also, were the real needs and interests of the separatist churches inimical to those of the mission churches? We thought not. In spite of what was being said by both groups, we felt that the highest interest of both could best be served by working toward better understanding, and reconciliation. Reconciliation means forgiveness; and forgiveness is the work of the Spirit of God!

"Is The Lord's Hand Shortened?"

From the very beginning one thing was clear: Uyo was not a mission field to be entered and worked in any of the old, well-known patterns of missions. Pioneering was needed. The pioneering had to be in a new approach commensurate with the complicated, confused Uyo church situation. We needed to pioneer in better Christian understanding and fellowship on the level where village Christians live and work and worship. This is where Christian doctrine is formed and lived.

Early in our coming, there seemed to be three possible ways to work. To the first, we were already committed. We had come to sponsor and to nurture a group of independent churches, the responsibility for which we had already accepted. A second possibility meant working in a role of reconciliation among the many competing Uyo churches. The third appealed to us most of all but has not yet

become a possibility. It was suggested to us by mission church leaders that we try to find some small tribe somewhere, among whom little or no work has been done, and with whom we could do some original creative work. Though we would very much have liked to do this, it never worked out. So we continued with the first two objectives.

It was impossible to work with our newly adopted Mennonite Church except in the frame of reference in which we found them. This included the religious pilgrimage, which had been their past, as well as their present religious environment. So if we were really going to help "our" churches, it had to be, not only in the context of these "other churches," but actually in relationship and in fellowship with them. They really wanted to be like the mission churches. They wanted to be accepted by them. We ourselves had to be free from the prejudices of the mission churches towards independents. We had to accept ourselves as "their" missionaries. While we were trying to work out our relation to the church with whom we came to work, we were at the same time trying to keep up relations with the oldest mission church of the Uyo area, namely, the Presbyterian Church. That we, as their new missionaries, had to get our residential visa through the good graces of the Presbyterian Church was a bitter experience for our Mennonite Church leaders, since a number of them were "break-aways" from that church.

Our dual role in working with the Presbyterian Church and at the same time sponsoring a separatist church had its problems. We are certain that many, if not most, of the leaders of both simply did not understand. We often wondered if we ourselves did.

The Reverend R. M. Macdonald, a veteran missionary of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission, had a vision toward the future. He felt, even more strongly than we did, that everything possible must be done for the separatist churches. They should be helped by someone who could somehow be accepted by both the mission and independent churches. For this reason he went all out to get acceptance for us and our program in his own and the rest of the mission churches. In spite of the difficulties of a seemingly dual role, this may well be one of the best ways open to us in trying to build bridges of understanding and reconciliation.

The problems we faced were, from the beginning, too great for us. What happened was in no way our doing. We simply waited and let God work them out one by one. **Reconciliation is the work of the Spirit of God.** If God is working, then we can expect new things to happen. "Is the Lord's hand shortened? Now you will see if my word will come true for you or not" (Numbers 11:23).

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

A future strategy for Uyo must take into consideration all the dynamics at work in the life of the people. The highly competitive nature of traditional clan and tribal life may have much to do with the strong tendency to competition so characteristic of Uyo church life today.

However, we must not forget that the divided Western mission churches, especially those coming in recent years, have taken undue advantage of the Uyo confusion to further their own objectives; and have done little or nothing to bring about any semblance of Christian unity. Division and disunity have increased to a point that dismays.

Whatever we now do must be done in such a way, and in such a relationship with other true followers of Christ, that His name (and not our divided churches) may be glorified.

New Frontiers

One of the encouraging features of the present Uyo multiple church life is the growing dissatisfaction. This is beginning to be freely expressed by both African and missionary church leaders. They are saying, "Something must be done about better understanding. We must find ways of communicating."

This made it comparatively easy to get the blessing of the Eastern Region Christian Council and the support of non-council churches for the formation of an Interchurch Study Group which met quarterly, to discuss possible ways of closer cooperation and study of our common problem — the separatist churches — with a view toward helping them. But obviously, before we can do much for independent churches, we must take a realistic look at our own dividedness and lack of understanding and cooperation.

For us, Uyo was a completely new frontier in missions. Whether we can make any progress toward our objective remains to be seen. The growing interest of participating members in the Interchurch Study Group gives us some hope. We firmly believe that this is one of the doors God was leading us to enter. We must move ahead with the faith and courage of Abraham going out into a strange and foreign land with God as leader.



Already more doors are opening up than we can possibly enter for a meaningful witness in cooperation and fellowship with others. New patterns of work have developed in such a way which we ourselves could never have planned or thought out. We feel that God has done this; that we need merely to wait and see how He will work it out, and obediently follow Him. Often we simply had to pray, "Lord, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

A Passion For Freedom

If western missions are to continue having a future at all in Africa, full recognition must be given to Africa's fierce passion for freedom. The new political freedom of the nations of Africa has set the pace for religious freedom. Any attempt on the part of Western missions to proselyte members for their Western churches, or to control the spiritual life of African Christians, is bound to end in resentment and failure.

Many good reasons have been suggested for the increasing number of African independent churches. But we believe that sufficient consideration has **not** been given to the naturally strong desire of the African to be free. He seems to say, "The white man could subjugate our bodies, but never our souls." Sympathy must be shown for the human rights of freedom and self-determination. Africa too must be free! The African must be given the right to become the person that God in His grace meant him to be!

It is unthinkable to come into Africa **now** and ignore what is happening politically. It is very difficult for a small, new mission to break in anywhere. It must be done with great care and much understanding of what the real needs of the people are, what was done in the past, and what is now being done. Contacts with governments and their officials are necessary. At the same time less organizational and more personalized witnessing is needed.

Colonial empires have all but disappeared from Africa. The handwriting is on the wall for the remaining few. Large colonial-type mission organizations will also go in time. Missions of all kinds must adjust themselves to the new day. Mission-controlled institutions, such as schools, will rapidly be taken over in independent African nations such as Nigeria.

It may be that the time has come to take John H. Yoder's migration evangelism seriously!¹ Certainly some new approaches in evangelism

¹ John H. Yoder, *As You Go* (Focal Pamphlet No. 5; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1961.)

need to be experimented with. It is significant to us that a number of Africans have voluntarily asked if there were not some American farmers who would come to live in their villages for a few years to teach them some things about modern methods of farming. Permanent migration to Nigeria is of course entirely out. Ownership of land by Westerners is illegal. Africans would never permanently give their land to non-Africans without a fight. This is what the fight is about in those African nations where non-Africans have settled. But coming for limited periods of time, living and working with people on the village level, demonstrating with their own hands, as well as in worship and witness, a better way of life is possible and desirable. It would take great courage and dedication!

An intriguing opportunity has opened up for us to establish a Bible school for an independent church, representing about 200 congregations. From our conversation with them, we know that there are other similar independent churches who are wanting help with getting a Bible school going. They will accept Bible and leadership training but will not give up their spiritual freedom and self-determination.

Especially when we first arrived we had contact with leaders, representing hundreds of congregations, who wanted help and were quite willing to become Mennonite. The problems involved in trying to help such churches was too great. We lost contact with many of these leaders. The time was not ripe for attempting a strategy of work with them. The process of establishing a relationship with the mission churches, and trying to create a more New Testament type of church with the ones that we were already working with was enough to cope with!

But later, after our first few years, we definitely felt that the time had come for us to try to find a way to work with more of the independent churches. By and large they do not have Bible schools or any real leadership training programs. They very much want this kind of help. Though we never gave up the thought of trying to do something for still other independent churches, we simply were not able realistically to cope with still more churches and yet do for them what they wanted and needed.

A Summary Of Advance

The early beginnings of our *Uyo Story* must come to an end. Possible future development of our mission witness can now be summarized.

First, more direct contact with people is needed. This was one of the secrets of the Mary Slessor-type missionaries. Missions so easily, so quickly institutionalize their witness. Missionaries must get out of their institutional and managerial offices, back out to witness and work, living closer to the people. The new frontiers are different! They are, however, just as rigorous as in the days of David Livingstone but a whole lot less glamorous. They are less physically demanding; but more spiritually challenging. Self-indulgent young people, immured with the ease and luxury of Western Christianity, will find it difficult. But the courageous will be challenged!

Second, we must continue to sponsor our emerging church. We must seek to work in close fellowship, rather than in control. The frequently idealized self-supported, self-propagated, self-controlled principles are not enough. These tend to separate missions and churches. What is needed rather is for missionaries to work closer, and in fellowship, with the new churches. Maturity in the fellowship of Christ, of both missionary and the church is the goal.

Third, to work in what may be called a "supportive role," with missions, even government and village sponsored projects, is wide open to us. Almost anywhere you go, the Church is there. Competitive mission programs are not the answer to today's need, but rather support of existing witness. We should work in fellowship and in cooperation with evangelical churches, supplying trained teachers, agriculturists, medical and other personnel for institutions administered by Africans. Our teachers in Presbyterian schools are an example of the supportive role in missions.

Fourth, we must also enter the door, now open to us, to work with many other separatist churches. Before it is too late we should make available to them one good Bible school for the Uyo area. And we must let them in on the planning and the administration of such a school. This seems to be the best, if not in fact the only, way to reach some of them.

Fifth, should we not keep alert to the possibility of working in places in West Africa, which are not so crowded with missions? There must be some sub-tribes or clans, who have hardly been touched with the Gospel message of God's love and forgiveness, and who do not have the Bible in their native tongue, and with whom we could do creative mission work avoiding the old institutional pattern of missions. In any case we would still have to work closely and in cooperation with other mission and church groups. Sometimes we have wondered, **why Uyo?** God knows. If Uyo is the way through to some other door, God will reveal this to us.

Not all has been told! Anyway, we now feel better. This ends *The Uyo Story* (Part I). But does it? Looking to the future, this could be merely the beginning!

INTRODUCTION: PART II

Part I tells what happened before 1964. Many have been asking: "How did *The Uyo Story* actually work out in the years that followed?"

This is the question we now want to answer.

This second part of the story goes on to the beginning of the civil war in June 1967, when most of us suddenly became the "diaspora."

Understanding, adjustment and progress do not come easily for anyone. Sociologists can best explain this. Speaking from our own personal experience, acculturation in the life of a missionary — if it takes place at all — takes place slowly and gradually rather than suddenly.

The change in our own attitudes, the reconciliation God was working in our own hearts, must somehow come through in our attempt to tell what happened after 1964. And more than that, much more than that, this is not "our" story. It is the combined story of the fifty-four representatives sent out by the Church in the years between 1959–1967, in response to the "Macedonian" call to Africa.

Was this all? By no means! There are the stories of literally hundreds of Nigerians in what was happening. These also ought to be told. Strictly speaking, "Uyo" is not the locale of our story. Uyo is only where we began. What happened we never could have thought or planned. God worked it out! To Him be the Glory!

THE EMERGING CHURCH

"Mennonite Church, Inc., Ikot Ada Idem" read the impressive sign introducing us to "our" independent churches back in 1959, when we first arrived in Nigeria. We had come a long way since that memorable day. And so had M. E. Umanah, who took us to see his little mud-thatched house of worship hidden a short distance in the bush. Where must it be now? Surely long since it must have been eaten by the everywhere-present termites.

In its place on the other side of the road now stands a large, cement-block, aluminum-roof church, easily able to seat 300-400 people. Because of its central location and fine building, conferences and general meetings were usually held in Ikot Ada Idem.

Other congregations, too, as rapidly as financially able, were collecting sand and making cement blocks with the view to building more permanent churches. Mud-thatched ones last only two or three years at the most. The building process frequently takes five to ten years while the fund-raising and block-making goes on apace. This seems a long, strange procedure to Westerners, but to Africans it is a logical, practical way of banking church funds. Too often members of a building or finance committee themselves are in need of money to build their own cement-block homes! The many little mud-churches one sees, completely engulfed by the walls of a large church still in the making, are a curiosity to those who do not understand the culture. Even a partially built cement-block church is a prestige factor. It shows progress! The time element is not so important in non-Western cultures.

Times have changed for Umanah too, poor fellow! He had so hoped that Ikot Ada Idem would become the headquarters for the church and mission, and that he would be recognized as top leader with an appropriate salary. It just did not work out that way. He no longer is a leader, or even a bona fide member of our church.

If nothing else, we have learned well to let Africans settle African palavers. There **are** ways foreigners can cooperate and work alongside, but when it comes to matters of discipline, Africans can best deal with Africans. We have often been amazed at the ease and simplicity with which they can settle their problems. In the West we could learn much from them!

Church construction.



Hireling

In 1966 an Inter-Church Team¹ did a five-mile-radius survey of Abak, a small town ten miles south of Uyo. Their report clearly reveals the type of leaders we had to deal with.

There is another pathetic story to tell in connection with the Abak churches that we would so much prefer not to tell. There are among leaders of the (independent) churches, men who are described by Jesus as "hirelings"² and by Paul as "deceitful"³ workers. They collect churches as a profitable business. The more churches the more lucrative their business. Their real interest is not the sheep of their flock, but their own economic security. One can employ such "hirelings" by the dozen — cheap — in Abak alone! Not knowing or perhaps not caring, overseas churches and organizations have done just this. Our hearts go out in deep sympathy, not for gullible foreign church leaders, who ought to know better, but for the many illiterate, deceived people (of Abak), who cannot possibly be expected to understand the true from the false. They need help. How can we help them in the right way?

Not many of the kind of leaders described above are interested in being "converted" to the true way. We found them very suspicious and quite unwilling to give us any real information about themselves or their churches. **They** are the founders of these churches. The churches are their personal property and their business! No one has a right to interfere. They do not want to be interviewed, and certainly not investigated.⁴

¹ In a September, 1963 meeting of the Eastern Region Committee (E.R.C.) of the National Christian Council (N.C.C.) official encouragement was given for forming what became known as the Inter-Church Team. The first members of the Team were T. O. Alozie (Anglican), E. Timothy (Presbyterian), A. J. Eminue (Mount Zion), I. U. Nsagak and E. I. Weaver (Mennonites). More about the work of the Team will later be mentioned in connection with the Inter-Church Study Group.

² John 10:12,13.

³ II Cor. 10:13.

⁴ The Team, *The Abak Story*, 1967, p. 41, available from the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, Inc. (M.B.M.C.), Box 370, Elkhart, Ind. 46514 (xerox).

In a spot survey of a 5-mile-radius area from the center of Abak (10 miles south of Uyo) we found 250 local congregations, representing 50 different denominations. The survey was invaluable in our understanding of the nature and the dynamics of the whole independent church movement in the Uyo area. The "team" approach to independent churches did much to allay suspicion that we had come to "convert" them to any of our own denominations. By trial and error we learned much about methods of survey, which would give us reliable information. We found the sending out of questionnaires almost useless.

From the time of our arrival in Uyo we sensed a change of leadership was inevitably necessary. The issue seemed so clear. We just did not know how to work it out. As time went on the significance of good leadership became more and more apparent. We then knew that "Leadership is one of the keys to an understanding of what independent churches are, and what, by the grace of God, they can become."⁵

New Testament Church

Back in our first conference in 1960 with various church leaders and delegated lay members, we were discussing church standards. Among other things the conference was so much wanting to know our stand on the touchy question of polygamy. The atmosphere was charged with suspense. Neither they nor we knew what would happen.

Finally we opened the door by asking, "What kind of a church do you want?" Quickly a young leader replied, "We want a New Testament Church!"

No better reply could have been offered. Many times this spontaneous response was our guide in finding answers to difficult problems of faith and discipline and practice. It also effectively closed the door to blindly following down the road of Western traditional patterns and answers!

With leadership came other issues, but foremost in their minds was: What would their new missionaries say about polygamy? We had to face it. So much depended on our answer!

⁵ Appendix III, p. 117.

POLYGAMY TOO?

Missionary leaders of the Older Churches were telling us that they could not tolerate polygamy in their membership. They did, however, baptize polygamous believers but would not accept them at the Lord's Table. This position did not seem to us to be consistent, especially if it was true, as Africans kept telling us, that many leaders in the mission churches do have extra wives or concubines hidden away. That this is the case has been widely confirmed. Now what do we do?

In the first place, we felt that whatever we would do, must be done in the open. People would have to know where we stood. Secondly, we wanted to take a New Testament stance on the issue as far as we understand what Paul meant in his pastoral letters.¹ In light of Paul's statements, and of Jesus saying nothing about it, we could well assume that there was polygamy in the early church. Jesus denounced divorce rather than polygamy.²

In the third place, we did not take a legalistic attitude in working out problems of discipline, including polygamy. We believed that the church would have to struggle openly and realistically in its effort to apply the Gospel. We believed that the Gospel could and should transform African culture, just as it does any other; but Africans, for the most part, must work it out.

"Their common cry is: 'We want to be Christians; but we want to be African Christians.'"³

African thoughts about marriage, for example, are more biblical than Western. They do not understand our Greek-Roman-Western concept of romantic love. We cannot take for granted that everything Western is

¹ I. Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6-8.

² Matt. 19:3; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18.

Here Jesus is speaking to the problem of divorce and not about polygyny which should be distinguished from polygamy. Polygamy is the practice of either a man or a woman having more than one mate; while polygyny, the more common, refers only to a man's having multiple spouses.

³ Kenneth I. Brown, in a recent letter to friends, dated April 1, 1969, after an extended visit to South and East Africa, contacting many independent churches.

Secondary School scholarship students. (page 74)



"gospel!" For our little independent Mennonite Church to try to find African answers to African problems was a big assignment!

Our readers will still want to know what happened after that first conference back there in 1960. We did not excommunicate polygamists; we merely refused them leadership roles of various kinds. We agreed to train young men to replace them. In spite of our effort to hold the church together on this basis, things happened quickly. Out of the fifty to sixty congregations we found ourselves with only ten left. With this nucleus we started building a New Testament Church.

We had taken our stand at the only place we could and maintain our integrity with the older mission churches. In our own little group of congregations there was much more interest in having a church with good standards than we realized. Without our knowledge young men attempting to take second wives were disciplined. Persons found guilty of adultery were excommunicated.

Christian Home

On the positive side we took every opportunity the church provided to teach about the Christian home. Since our church does not practice infant baptism we strongly encouraged dedication of children. This was widely accepted and, when once understood, very much appreciated. We used such services to emphasize the Christian home. The Apostles Paul and Peter both give excellent instruction on the home to young churches which can be effectively used in Africa. We believe there was progress, and that such an open, positive, scriptural approach is ever so much more effective than a negative, legalistic attitude.

chapter three

WHO DECIDES?

The question keeps recurring: what really happens when a foreign mission sponsors an African independent church? Much depends, of course, on **who** answers the question. The answer can range from a complete withdrawal from them, because of not having adequately understood reasons for independency, to a real involvement in spite of everything! Any foreign mission which follows the way of involvement takes the risk of being misunderstood by the "older churches"¹ who could consider this an affront to their years of church building.

In working with independent churches a sponsoring mission must carefully observe principles of self-determination. This applies to the whole process of change within the life of the church. In Africa everyone must participate in whatever new patterns develop.

Independent churches universally are strongly centralized and controlled. Ours was no exception. To see what would happen when an African church inductively worked out its organization and discipline, its faith and practice, was indeed an exciting experience to watch! Instead of Western denominational traditions, formal documents and creeds, they had the Bible and the Holy Spirit as Guide!

"There are many leader-figures on the African scene: kings, chiefs, elders and headmen, priests, diviners and oracles, rain-makers, doctors and herbalists."²

The older churches from the West brought their own leader patterns to Africa: bishops, priests, pastors, elders, catechists, evangelists, deacons, etc.

But there is still a third familiar category of charismatic leadership on the African scene, commonly accepted by the rapidly growing Pentecostal churches:

¹ H. W. Turner, one of the most widely known authorities on Independent African Churches prefers this term for the variously called, "mission churches," "historic churches," regular churches, etc. See "A Typology For African Religious Movements," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 1 (1967), 18-21.

² John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, p. 135.

"And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues."³

Our independent church had to be free to choose from the above patterns, or eclectically develop its own. African culture does not easily distinguish between the secular and the spiritual. Traditional village customs are bound to carry over into the life of the church.

On two counts chiefs found it difficult to qualify for membership in the older churches. One was of course polygamy. The other was the traditional role of the chief as both secular and religious leader in the village community, a pattern not so compatible with orthodox Western organizational tradition. Most of our early leaders were chiefs. It must be said that **not all** chiefs were polygamists. Furthermore, many of them are natural leaders, wise men, who are able to make a worthwhile, much needed contribution to the life of the church. How could our church develop a new leadership pattern without destroying cultural values in the old? This was clearly the issue. This is how they worked it out.

According to each local situation young men were appointed and given the title "local leader," while the chiefs, the natural leaders, were retained in the membership. Here they could still function as the natural advisers in the familiar village pattern.

In the beginning our church was highly centralized, following the typical independent church pattern. Instead of one top leader controlling everything and everyone, our conference set up an area-represented executive committee, on which we missionaries too were chosen as members. This certainly was a step forward away from a one-man rule. Our committee very closely supervised the local leaders and their congregations. By experience, trial and error, we learned the inadvisability of this kind of close, centralized administration. In African villages the people are accustomed to work as units, managing their own affairs, with minimal outside interference.

Our centralized system was not working well. More and more there arose difficult problems of discipline. In trying to handle these the executive committee fumbled. We interfered too much in making decisions which needed to be made by the congregations themselves. So a new step in the organization of the church developed.

³ 1 Cor. 12:28.

The members came from four different clans⁴ of the Ibibio tribe. Though scattered over an area as much as forty to fifty miles apart, we naively thought, that since practically all were Ibibio, there would be little trouble organizing them strongly under a central committee. In the beginning they were so disorganized centralization seemed to be the only answer. The Africans on our executive committee were as inexperienced as we. We all had to learn together.

Clan feelings were too strong. We had changed too quickly. Often bitter misunderstanding arose between them over cultural differences, which to us were unrecognizable. Wisely our committee began to adjust its policies, giving more and more responsibility into the hands of the clans and their respective congregations.

The clan units we began to call "areas" and appointed "area leaders" responsible for the congregations and work in the areas. After this the administration of the church, especially in matters of discipline, worked out much better. Under this new arrangement more and more responsibility was given to local congregations. The whole pattern of church government was almost reversed. The action was now moving in the opposite direction from the local congregation to the area committee, to the executive committee, the final appeal of authority responsible to the conference.

Even before 1964 we (missionaries) were urging the conference to take steps to ordain ministers, and to clarify, by giving definite titles, the different roles or levels of leadership. Some congregations on their own appointed elders, deacons, deaconesses, but these were never really officially recognized by the conference. The ordination which finally took place in 1967 will be described in chapter six.

Why was the church so slow to make up its mind? For one thing, an independent church left on its own does not move quickly. It is the missionary who pushes! Africans given self-determination will take their time in working out cultural changes. There could also be another valid reason. Some of our members come from Catholic background, some from Protestant, others had always been members of one or another of the independent churches. A few came right out of paganism. In the life of our little independent church we could recognize all these different influences at work. They could choose from among the three different leadership patterns described above, or they could well develop their own eclectic pattern. This is what we think will eventually happen. A clear pattern has still not developed.

⁴ The four clan areas of our church were: Ibibio (Uyo), Itam, Ubium, Anang (Abak). Anang is really a sub-tribe of the Ibibio, much larger than the average clan. Their language and culture is also quite different from the other three areas.

A congregation prays on behalf of the family of a sorcerer who has accepted Christ.



chapter four

AFRICAN ANSWERS FOR AFRICAN QUESTIONS

What happens when a foreign mission sponsors an African independent church? We have just answered the question insofar as it relates to organization. Now what about doctrine and practice?

The answer depends so much on the objectives of a mission, the goals toward which it is driving. Attitudes toward the African people and their culture is exceedingly important. Attempts to develop replicas of Western churches will some day result in reaction and rejection. Someone will have to start all over again!

"Theology is essentially the process of seeking in Scriptures the answers to our questions. The one basic assumption that all these groups (African independent churches) accept is that Christianity is foreign and they are called to make it African. . . . They are doing something the church should have been doing for years, that is, seeking answers to questions in their own categories of thought. The Separatist movement is a crystal clear sign that the church has failed to lose its 'foreignness.' For many Christianity represents someone else's answers to someone else's questions." ¹

Much is being said by both Western and African theologians about the need for a more African theology, one expressed in African "categories of thought," as Don Jacobs puts it. However, so far there has been little real confrontation between the church in Africa and its religious heritage.

Both Africa and the West are experiencing catastrophic changes and adjustments. Independent churches need to understand and to apply the Gospel to both the past and the present changing world. Their "new" theology has somehow to fit both. Also they need to understand their small independent world in relation to the world church of our Lord Jesus Christ! In the formation of independent church theology these perspectives need consideration. There is good reason for

¹ Donald R. Jacobs, "Biblical Theological-Cultural Issues in Leadership Training," a three-page paper available from M.B.M.C., Box 370, Elkhart, Ind. 46514 (xerox).

theologians saying that both African and Western theologians must work it out. We heartily agree. But we still have to ask: Where is theology made? We believe it is "lived" rather than "made."

If theology can be said to move in any direction it moves from "living experiences" to "propositional statements" rather than in the reverse order. This is said not to discredit high-level theological studies. Such are necessary. But the gap between high-level discussion and village Christian living must be bridged. Theologically, much happens at the grass roots, where the real confrontation between Gospel and culture takes place. The real "hang-up" is on the congregational level.

How does a sponsoring mission, determined not to merely hand over its own theology and practice, begin to cooperate with an independent church in working out more African answers? For one thing, the Gospel is exceedingly simple. Its message must be preached simply and lived out simply in the context of any culture.

The impact of the Gospel on the life of the people around Uyo had been tremendous. At least 90 percent claim to be Christian. Most members of independent churches too have a simple Gospel theology. An experience of the saving grace of God in Christ does not depend on deep theological insight. What is so much needed is nurture and instruction, so that believers may "leave the elemental doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity."² One of the truly great joys and rewards of working with African Christians is their eagerness to learn. They will make unbelievable sacrifices to be taught the Bible. The Bible in the hands of teachers able to interpret the Scriptures correctly, the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers who are willing to receive and apply the Scriptures to their daily lives — this is how! This is how foreign missionaries can best help independent churches.

² Heb. 6:1.

chapter five

PRIORITIES

What happens when a foreign mission sponsors an African independent church? So much depends on what is done about developing good leadership.

"No one will seriously question the statement that at the heart of the problems facing all independent churches is the leadership question. Though not the only problem, certainly a major issue is the preparation of a better spiritually and educationally qualified leadership. Working with independent churches one is deeply impressed by the prevalent strong desire among them for just this kind of leadership."¹

In the first conference, referred to earlier, a list of priorities for the mission was carefully worked out. A Bible school to train leaders headed the list, closely followed by requests for schools and hospitals. The priority given to a Bible school showed insight into their basic needs as a church. The list also revealed their demand that we become an "established" mission. In the next chapter we wish to show our determination not to become an "establishment!" A struggle on these issues continued throughout. The church never did quite understand us, or give up the hope that eventually we would settle in to be a proper mission. It is entirely possible that we **reacted** too much.

Immediately we responded to the church's request for Bible training. Three-day, monthly Bible classes were arranged in various congregations. Interested young men throughout the church were invited. It was a feeble effort, but out of it later came some of our finest leaders. Among them was O. E. Essiet, ordained as the first minister just before our exodus in 1967.

From the beginning we wanted a Bible school. But not until around February 1, 1964, in cooperation with other independent churches² similar to our own, did we actually get started. We ourselves hardly had

¹ Appendix III, p. 117.

² The World Christian Crusade, with their three independent churches, joined with us in planning our Uyo Bible School. Their churches were: The Full Gospel, the Pentecostal Faith and the Full Gospel.

enough congregations to develop a good Bible school. With the coming of colleagues,³ and the cooperation of other independent churches, we opened school with fifty students.

A Bible School

Later, when we saw what was happening, our eyes were opened to the significance of the Bible school approach to independent churches. We are now completely convinced. In a new place this is where we would begin. We would learn from our mistakes. We would take advantage of what we learned about gaining entree to independent churches. And we would start more quickly with a good Bible school, training leaders on a congregational level. This is where and how we would start.

Scholarships – Not Schools

To our church's various requests we had to respond responsibly. Concerning the request for a Bible school, we took action as quickly as possible and in the best way we knew how. We also responded positively to their keen desire for an education. Immediately we set up a scholarship program, making it possible for a dozen young people to start their secondary school education. We believed that scholarships were a better response than secondary schools. Every area was clamoring for a school, but already there were secondary schools all over the place.

From 1960 on our scholarship program greatly expanded in number and levels, into areas of higher theological education, nurses training, agriculture, and various trades.

A revolving fund plan for additional scholarships was set up by the executive committee. After gaining employment, all higher level grantees were required to start paying back into this fund. The church recognized its responsibility to make such an arrangement in order to increase the future available scholarships for its young people. The principle of certain scholarship recipients paying back into a church-controlled and operated fund was generally accepted; but the details of the policy were still evolving in 1967 when the war halted everything. Some cultural factors were involved.

³ Darrel Hostetlers arrived late in 1963 to help with the church and the Bible School. Then also some Nigerians from our various cooperating churches came in addition to Cecil and Judy Miller, village agriculture workers.

The atmosphere of our whole church was changing. Congregations were filling with young people. There were two important reasons for this: church attendants previously were mostly old people and small children. Educated young people in Africa will no longer attend churches with untrained leaders. Second: our scholarship program was bringing back into our congregations many fine young people who were organizing the youth and holding retreats. Doing things! They were bringing new life into the church!

Going back to the "training leaders for congregations" question, our readers will quickly sense our most troublesome, knotty question. In Africa too, preachers know that "a laborer is worthy of his hire."⁴ We never really found the answer; we only worked at it. In traditional society the charismatic leader, be he healer or diviner, receives his income from his special service to individuals who pay. A church is not so happy to pay a gifted preacher or a man of prayer.

Most of the men we trained, had already been called by their congregations (as lay leaders rather than ordained pastors), and had additional means of livelihood: a wife's farm, some trade or business of their own.

Tent-Making

As part of the scholarship program, in addition to the Bible school training, we were offering scholarships for some kind of trade training. We were really experimenting with a kind of "tent-making" ministry. It does have limitations and weaknesses. But a gifted, Bible-trained, pastoral-minded leader, living among the people, plying his own trade in the village, does have some definite advantages over the full-time professional church leader. As congregations are able and willing they can still call a full-time pastor. The need is there for better leadership on the village congregational level. More freedom and flexibility for congregations to experiment in working out their leadership problem would seem right to us, provided the need for better training is not neglected.

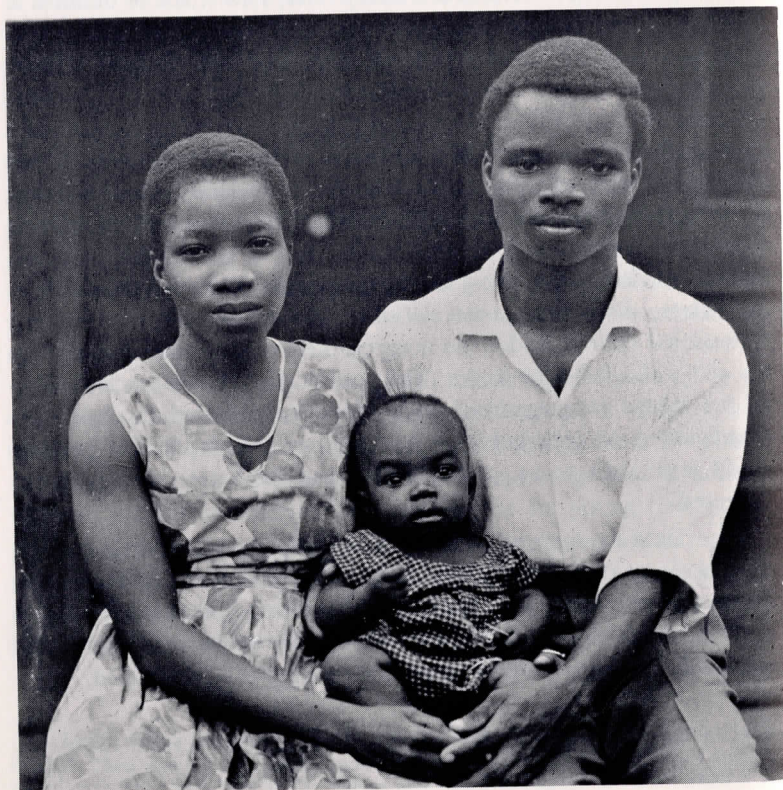
To effectively sponsor an independent church, it seems clear to us, the place one starts is with the local congregation and its leadership. But this is not where you stop! It is only where you begin. There are levels of leadership in the church that have to be recognized, and necessarily there are levels of leadership training to be developed.

⁴ Luke 10:7.

We already had area leaders, responsible for five to ten congregations. These men needed higher training. The church was looking forward to ordaining pastors. These too needed more training than we were giving in our Uyo Bible School. The leadership of the church must grow with the church. Quite a number of men were sent to higher theological colleges.⁵ When better trained men were needed in the work of the church, they were available. The church was happy to call them.

⁵ The Qua Iboe Church Bible College, Ikot Ekong; the United Missionary Society Theological College, Ilorin, Nigeria. We sent most of our won men to these two colleges. Theological Education Fund (T.E.F.) gave scholarships to students attending the latter.

O. E. Essiet family. Essiet attended Uyo Bible School and was the first ordained Nigerian Mennonite pastor.



PASTOR ESSIET

O. E. Essiet was just a young man, possibly in his late teens, when we first arrived in Uyo. He came from Eket side, near the ocean. Faithfully, with his fast friend Ekanem, he cycled the 30 miles from his home to attend our first Bible classes. These two young men never missed. Daniel Essiet, described in chapter two, Part I, of our story, was his uncle. Prior to our arrival on the scene O. E. was a teacher¹ in one of his uncle's churches. Incidentally, just before we left, we heard that Daniel lost his hold on his churches and went back to his fishing.

Essiet, as everyone lovingly calls him, is a solid, dependable, quiet sort of a person, with excellent judgment, well liked by nearly everyone.

After serving for a few years as a local leader, he was made an area leader and sent to Ikot Ekong, near Abak, the higher level theological college of the Qua Iboe Church.

We were at the January 1967 annual church conference in Ikot Ada Idem where "big" meetings nearly always took place. We were nearing the end of the conference. The truly big palaver was left for last. After years of urging the church to choose men for ordination to the ministry, they were finally willing to act. It was a dramatic experience for all of us. The manner of choosing the person or persons, the time and place, all had to be decided. They were ready.

To begin, only one person was wanted. The manner of choosing that one person took some palaver. It was a new experience. There were no precedents. O. E. Essiet, vice-chairman of the conference, was sitting on the rostrum. There was no doubt about whom the great majority wanted. But no one would nominate him. Finally, when the name Essiet was suggested there was loud, long applauding. It was decided by a typical African "consensus."

An election or voting would have seemed very much out of place. Only a few from one area were displeased. It was also decided that the ordination would be on Easter Sunday, in Ikot Eyo, the congregation closest to Essiet's home. His people were rejoicing that one of their own sons was to become the first ordained minister of the church.

¹ Independent churches use a type of local leader with this designation to teach the Bible to members, though they may have had little or no special training.

On Easter Sunday from the four areas of our church, people gathered in Ikot Eyo for the ordination services which continued throughout the day. Many came walking for miles; others used cycle taxis; and there were even chartered buses. It was a great occasion, which called for special celebration. Seating accommodations were extended on three sides of the church by a palm branch pavilion. A brass band, so important in Africa, played at various intervals in the program. In the homes around the church women were preparing huge kettles of hot "soup." The pungent odors of palm oil and peppers filled the air. We could hear the pounding of yams for "fufu."² After the service there would be a great feast.

The time of service had come. People took their seats. Everything now was quiet. This too is African. The singing began. Once again we sang and clapped with African abandon. Though solemn, it was a joyous occasion. Essiet, with Adiaha, his wife, and two small children were all seated on the front bench. Close by sat his aged father who during the service gave a moving testimony of appreciation. The charge was given. Both Essiet and Adiaha made vows of dedication to the service of God and the church. The congregation was filled with awe and thanksgiving.

Essiet now was their shepherd. In true independent church fashion, they robed him in white. A communion service followed with Essiet in charge!

*God Is Working His Purpose Out*³

I

God is working His Purpose out
As year succeeds to year;
God is working His Purpose out
And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

² Fu-fu boiled yam, pounded in mortars to a fine, sticky consistency. It is eaten by dipping small balls into peppery, hot soup and swallowed whole, without chewing.

³ Arthur C. Ainger (1841-1919), *Pilgrim Hymnal*, p. 298.

II

From uttermost east to uttermost west,
Where e're man's foot hath trod,
By the mouth of many messengers
Goes forth the voice of God;
Give ear to me ye continents,
Ye isles give ear to me,
That the earth may be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

III

March we forth in the strength of God
With the banner of Christ unfurled
That the light of the glorious Gospel truth
May shine throughout the world;
Fight we the fight with sorrow and sin
To set the captives free,
That the earth may be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

IV

All we can do is nothing worth
Unless God blesses the deed,
Vainly we hope for the harvest tide
Till God gives life to the seed;
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

A MISSION: WAS THERE ONE?

On every side we were surrounded by mission compounds. Constantly the church pressured us to have landmarks in buildings and headquarter locations. They wanted a mark of identity, some place they could call a mission. There was nothing of which they could say, "This is ours. This is the Mennonite Mission Headquarters." There wasn't that tangible something which would tie them to the Mennonite Church in the States. There was nothing tangible which would remain with them always. The church was still asking for the physical facilities of which the older mission churches boasted.

From the beginning we struggled to explain and establish the principles of indigenous church growth. Repeatedly we spoke of "helping them to become a strong church."¹

A recurring statement came through correspondence from Elkhart, reflecting the growing thought in mission strategy: "Live among the people. Get away from mission compounds." From the beginning this was a goal and a challenge.

Mission Property: There Was None!

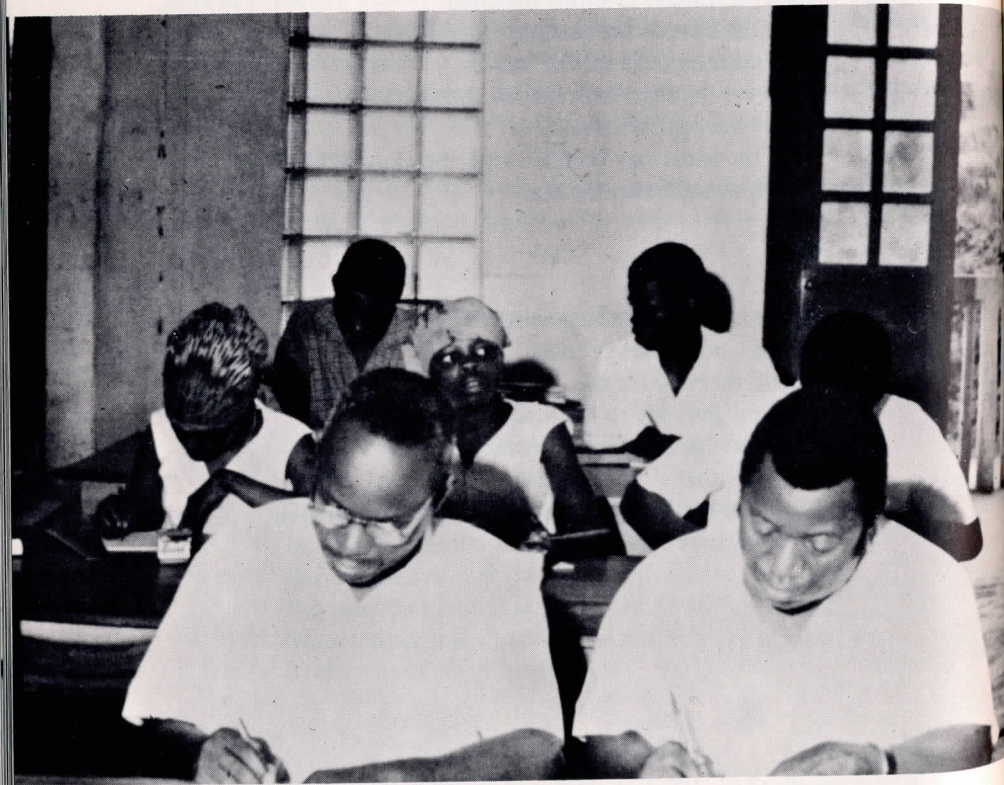
To choose to live among the people was not difficult because the Mission Board did not own property in East Nigeria.

Did we say not difficult? Well it wasn't all that easy. As much as we agreed to the principle, at times we longed for a little more privacy, a little less noise. Perhaps to the phrase "Get away from your compounds, live among your people," should be added: with more frequent furloughs.

We moved from one rented property to another. While we struggled with the mechanics of each move we learned to be flexible and easily agreed to the advantages of living simply. We learned the importance of not being rooted to one place. We found ourselves taking a new look at persons.

A comfortable interlude was the three and a half years we lived in the old Scottish Presbyterian mission bungalow in Ikot Inyang, twenty

Uyo Bible School class. "... and now we were establishing a Bible School *with* other independent churches... (page 91)."



¹ *The Uyo Story* Part I, p. 19.

miles away from our first two rented homes in Uyo.² We were too new in all that was happening to us to evaluate what this move meant. It was here, during these three years, as we tested our convictions concerning the values of working in a cooperative ministry³ in Nigeria, that opportunities to do so began to materialize. Chapter nine of Part II discusses the cooperative role more fully.

Each day we lived and relived the struggle and hope we experienced in II Chron. 20:12-15b. So much of the time we didn't know what to do, but we kept looking to God for guidance.

At times our many moves made little sense to us. Certainly the church could not understand. Hopefully, each area of the church was offering us land where we could establish a center and build a "mission house." We are sure the missionaries of other denominations didn't understand. Even our village landlords from whom we rented were perplexed at our coming and going. One landlord put a ju-ju symbol over the front door soon after we moved away from his house.

Among Ibo And Ibibio

By Christmas of 1964 we left Ikot Inyang and moved back to Uyo. This was a new beginning for us. Our move from the Presbyterian mission house to a two-story apartment house in Uyo was symbolically significant.

In Ikot Inyang we were in Mary Slessor⁴ country, under the wing of the Presbyterian Church. We were in a typical mission compound. Now in Uyo we were back where we started — as neighbors to Africans. This time we were sharing a house with an Ibo and an Efik family. Each family shared with us deep tribal feelings. We learned much from them. We learned to understand, and love, and share with them in a deeper way.

Compound Walls: Do We Not Really Have?

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to inject this thought. Of course where there is no property, offices, or dwellings, there is no need for a wall, or symbol of wall to mark it off. In Nigeria there are fewer mission compound walls than we had been accustomed to in India.

² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

There was no wall with an impressive gate; no official signboard; nothing to direct the way to our house. No! To those who asked we said, "Follow the road left of the Post Office in Uyo, to Nsit Street. The marker has been knocked down several times, so there may be no sign there. On the corner to the right you no doubt will see a washerman at work. It is about five poles from the Post Office. Turn right there, and go to the second house. It is just beyond the cassava patch. We live upstairs."

Even though this is the way we wanted it to be, it would be untrue to say that at times we wished there could have been some sort of divider. More difficult to handle was the wall within which at times just built up overnight and during especially trying circumstances. My own wall, ghost wall, had an uncanny way of just being there when the water supply was low; when our water drum held the only supply in the compound.

More "separating" than the brick wall, could be this sinister wall inside — more easily recognized too, by the nationals — more wrong than anything built for show.

What was ours was theirs, our water, garden spade, machette, umbrella, bicycle. What was theirs was ours too. If we needed what our neighbor had, we could take it and be understood. Could we understand when he took what he needed of ours?

If compound walls could speak, what couldn't they say, and what wouldn't they say? Some we should hear, though we may not want to.

With no structural barriers the doors were wide open for free person-to-person relationships.

FREE? FREE TO STRUGGLE

We were free, but not altogether. We were free to struggle. Certainly we were free to live without anything which symbolized compound walls. But we had to enter the struggle with the church. They were not ready to give up the marks of prestige or identification. They still dreamed of a mission, of a Mennonite Mission Headquarters. This spelled out much more to them than we realized. We also had to remember that we were not there to tell them they must do thus and so.

Struggle must find expression somewhere. So it was that the mud house¹ at Ikot Obio Ama came into being. Mud house! So what! It was something, and soon the villagers were talking about "The Mission."

From the beginning it belonged to the church.² This completed house for missionary occupancy was the property of the church. It was not the property of the Mission Board. As long as the church offered it to us to use as a dwelling home, we would happily use it. It would never legally belong to us. This principle seemed so right, and one which the church could understand. In a sense it was all theirs and all ours.

This also held true for the rest house in Ibianga which was built a few years later. Though this house was built with mission funds, the Board holds no legal claims to the building. It is ours to use; it is theirs to own.

It is interesting to note at the time of this writing (January 1969) that in the absence of missionaries in Nigeria, the church seems to be holding these properties for the purpose for which they were built. There can be no difficulty with such an arrangement. There is nothing to fight about. Time will prove or disprove the rightness of this principle.

¹ *The Uyo Story* Part I, p. 43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 44.



Free to live anywhere.

Free To Live Anywhere

We were free to live anywhere, to rent a house in the locality we chose. Again this was good. Living far from one another we naturally found our relationships with the people among whom we lived. One thing was certain, we were never plagued with the thought of having to conform to the standards of a mission compound. We made our own schedules, or tried to. The day's encounters could very well start with the ringing of the early morning prayer bell.

Free to live anywhere, to initiate new patterns of work, to make our own schedules, demanded the strictest discipline. Constantly we checked our motives. Though we were free from organizational structure, and lived far from one another, we were very closely knit together in purpose. Perhaps this very freedom brought us all close together. We wanted to be "God's people in mission."

Free To Include Others

The lack of rigid organizational structure forced us to find other ways of keeping close together. We very much needed each other. We needed to feel the loyalties of belonging to one team. We need to feel a security in the response of the home church to us as a group.

It was very important that we try to get together more often for worship and fun. We all strongly felt the need for this, and so diligently worked at making our get-togethers meaningful.

Since we had no buildings of our own, we met wherever we could find a suitable place: the interdenominational setting of the Rural Training Center in Asaba on the west bank of the Niger; the Lutheran hostel for missionaries' children in Obot Idem, five miles from Uyo; the Trinity College compound in Umuahia; the hospital compound in Abiriba; the Presbyterian McGregor College in Afikpo; the Methodist and Presbyterian United Secondary School in Ibiaku, near Ikot Inyang. These, and the ocean beaches at Opobo and Ibino, and the swimming pool and rest house in Abak were some of the choice spots where we met for fun and worship. Friends from other groups often met with us. We felt free to include them.

One experience led to another and we found ourselves not only sharing with others outside our group in fun and worship but also in Bible study fellowships, in women's church programs, and in interchurch study groups. We felt at ease in these interdenominational settings. We were a team sent out by the church and the Mission Board to the church in Nigeria.

The freedom to include others and to work with them was not easy for the nationals to understand. They still thought in terms of a mission. This freedom was not the closed pattern of working relationships they had known. Perhaps the following incident will make this point clear.

Mandu

It was Mandu again. She came often now. For weeks she had been testing her relationship to us. Something was troubling her. We had worked together in the women's program for some time. She was so loved by the women and really accepted by them. Her personality was a spark of life in every gathering. But Mandu was not sure of herself with us.

She was a member of the Apostolic Church in the heart of Uyo. Whenever possible she took part in the activities of her church. Often she would say, "I can't come tomorrow because my church is having a fast day."

Now this morning, we sat talking of the coming women's meeting in Itam, one of the four areas in which we worked. "Madam," said Mandu, "I will join your church. I will be a Mennonite." So this is what was troubling her. She thought she must belong to our church, in order to work for us. This was the accepted pattern. If you worked for Catholics, you became a Catholic. Therefore, if you worked for the Mennonites, you must be a Mennonite. I was taken aback.

"Mandu," I said, "you do not have to be a Mennonite to work with me. It would please me very much to have you remain a strong faithful member of your own church. Sometime in the future, if for reasons other than work, you feel you want to join with us, we would gladly accept you as a member. But that is another matter. For now, be the best Apostolic member you can be. We still can work together." Mandu remained a member of her church.

To have said this to her was like unlocking the door to her to free self. We have often thought of her as a "child of laughter, free to dance and clap and sing."

Free To Be Ourselves

Time after time, during those first months the women tried to share their feelings with me. They couldn't understand what kept me glued to the low bamboo bench. Why couldn't I feel free to dance with them? I am sure they were ready to chalk me off as "missionary impossible."

One special time, in a women's meeting, I again sat quietly while the women danced. After all, didn't I have a right to worship in my own way — quietly? Wasn't I mentally giving them freedom to worship in their way? Even the little ones, bobbing up and down on their mothers' backs, looked more comfortable than I felt. The big drum kept on beating out the time. My silence was too loud; my immovability too defying. I was looking straight ahead, not really seeing anything, when I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. I turned quickly to see a dear old lady standing by me. She didn't say anything, and yet I understood. After a moment or two, she put her hand, gently, under my arm and urged me to my feet.

"This is it," I said to myself. "This is the end of you, Irene Weaver." It was. I was free to be one of them. We danced and we clapped with a new feeling of oneness. It was like crossing a bridge into a new world. So much was mine to learn and experience. One thing very special became real to me then — that worship has no set pattern, and that I could be and was free to worship in their way.

Free To Be A Mission

In the truest sense we were not a mission. Rather we were a team of colleagues working in a cooperative role wherever we could in a mission of reconciliation.

chapter nine

SUPPORTIVE

The "supportive role in mission" was partly worked out by design and partly by circumstances. It could better be said to have started by circumstances and developed by design. Let us explain. This can best be done by illustration.

The Presbyterian Church graciously made it possible for us to stay in Nigeria. Elkhart responded by sending them teachers for secondary schools. Already by 1961 Daniel Dieners were in Calabar. Others followed. Representatives of the different types of institutions to which were sent supportive personnel were: Keith Hostetlers (1964-66) taught first in Calabar, then at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Clair Brennemans (1964-67) took an administrative assignment in the Rural Training Center, Asaba; Joan Souder (1965-67) was principal of the Sir Francis Ibiom Girls' Secondary School, Afikpo. Each of the above respectively represents, a mission church, the Government and a community. Mention would be made of all the other fine personnel sent to Nigeria by Elkhart, if space permitted. The above are but a few examples of what we are choosing to call the supportive role in missions.

Cooperative

"Cooperation in mission" is different from "support in mission." To distinguish one from the other is not at all easy, since they are so interrelated. Yet they are basically different, each with its own precise meaning. These precise meanings are helpful in trying to interpret what happened in our Nigeria mission. To support is to hold up, to cooperate is to act jointly with others.

The difference between the two can be further explained by saying cooperation requires greater involvement and a different relationship. It is more something that is done **with** others, rather than **for** others. This contrasts with just fitting into mission or government programs already going. It has more dynamic possibilities. However, let it be clear, a supportive role in mission is fully justified — provided the institutions are filling real needs. The supporting mission must determine this for itself.

Illustrations should now be given to still further clarify the nature of a cooperating mission.

Abiriba hospital¹ started in 1960 as a cooperative project. Its very name is suggestive: "Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital." It is sponsored by the community, aided by the Government, and administered by a voluntary agency. We are the voluntary agency. The Akahaba Age Group, along with the community, gives heavily toward its development, while the Government takes full responsibility for the annual operating budget. The mission administrative committee works in close cooperation with a hospital board representing all interested groups. From the beginning we were most excited about this kind of cooperation in mission. After eight years we still feel the same. The twenty-one Mission Board appointees, together with the Nigerians **cooperating** in a dedicated ministry, have won the hospital status and recognition.

The Uyo United Independent Churches Bible College² (don't mind the name!) was "cooperative" rather than "supportive." In Uyo we were working with independent churches. It is exceedingly difficult to get cooperation across to independent churches. The "support" idea is so much better understood! Independent churches are constantly looking for some mission to "support" them and their programs. Keeping self-respect in human relations requires doing things **with** people rather than **for** them. We wanted to work **with** independent churches in reciprocal ways.

During the few short years our Bible school was operating, over ten different independent churches sent students. The difference these students made in their churches was thrilling to observe. Changes and developments in the school were in the direction of more and more participation by the cooperating churches in its planning and administration. We are convinced of the Bible school approach to the African independent church problem — if it can be done on a cooperative basis, and not with the purpose of implanting a Western theology and denomination.

Our "cooperative" viewpoint became increasingly more difficult for our own Mennonite Church in Uyo to understand. We helped establish

¹ Dr. Ibiam (Sir Francis) founded the Abiriba hospital for the Presbyterian Church. Being pressed for medical personnel Dr. Ibiam had to be transferred to another hospital. Consequently, Abiriba practically folded up. The progressive Abiribans would not let it die quite so easily. The Abiriba "Akahaba Age Group" made it a special project, and along with the Presbyterians were eagerly looking for a voluntary agency to administer a new hospital they wanted to develop. We came along at just the right time.

² See footnotes 2, p. 73 and 3, p. 74.

a hospital in Abiriba in another tribal area, when they had wanted hospitals; and now we were establishing a Bible school **with** other independent churches, not for them, as they had requested. From the beginning our strategy of mission was offensive. However, our church was interested in and cooperated with others in the school's development. Not until the last few years did some of our leaders understand the significance **for them** of the kind of cooperative interchurch role we were trying to work out.

The Bible school opened up for them and for us the whole world of independent churches in a new way, a world which neither we nor they had really understood. Though the Bible school was not "their" institution, any more than that of any other church, they took a leading role in it. After all, they "had" the mission. In addition to the leadership training objective of the Bible school, it had the additional value of bringing us all into a new world of greater understanding and acceptance of each other.

This brief story does not permit us to go deeply into all the facets of our cooperative strategy of mission. Still a third illustration ought to be given to show how it all "hooks and eyes" together. The struggle over several years to get acceptance by all participating groups can only be imagined.

The organizing unit or center for this third area of cooperative mission was the Inter-Church Study Group (I.C.S.G.). In the Mennonite Board of Missions (Elkhart, Indiana) files are nearly fifty papers growing out of, or related to, the work of the I.C.S.G. which are available for study.

A revised, final statement of the objectives and organization of the I.C.S.G. is appended (Appendix No. IV) for fuller explanation to those interested in knowing how it functioned. The authors would especially recommend that our readers take a look at the chart attached therein, to note how the following related to the I.C.S.G.: the Eastern Region Committee (E.R.C.) of the National Christian Council (N.C.C.), the older churches, the independent churches, the Bible school, and, finally, the interchurch team. Think of the I.C.S.G. as the organizing center, and as being sponsored by the E.R.C., while the working committee for the I.C.S.G. was the interchurch team. In words it all seems complicated; on the chart it fits together very simply.

The significance of the I.C.S.G. was its effort to bring older and independent churches together into some kind of meaningful relationships. It was one place we could all meet: Protestants, Independents, and Catholics. And it had to be on neutral ground. Interest in this kind of a common meeting kept growing.

Creative

So far in this chapter we have discussed supportive and cooperative roles in mission, with greater emphasis on the cooperative. We believe that this is as it should be. There is still a third adjective we want to use to describe our mission in Nigeria. By force of circumstance it had to be creative as well as supportive and cooperative. We had no structured mission program or plan. We purposefully avoided going down the old road of institutional establishment. This is not criticism of missions in earlier days. We too traveled that road. It is simply that we were in a new place in a new day. Further, we were not working in churches we had fathered. We were working in independent churches that were asking for help. Old established patterns would not fit Uyo!

In Nigeria we had to experiment in new creative patterns of mission. Our personnel working in long-established mission institutions also had to be creative, not in structuring a program, but in developing new patterns for interchurch witnessing. Many had never worked with other denominations. It was traumatic, as well as a new, creative experience in mission. The new day in mission requires just this kind of interchurch relating and witnessing. The world no longer listens to a divided church.

Kalu

Kalu was one of several Ibo lads who graduated from the Uyo Bible School. Use Abat, his home village, was predominantly Ibo, in Ibibio country, only about ten miles from Uyo. After completing his training he was first called to be local leader in his home congregation near Use Abat. Some time later he was called to one of our larger congregations in the village of Obio Ibiono, not too far from his home.

Kalu had learned his lessons well in school. In less than a year he had all the churches in Obio Ibiono meeting once a month in a united Sunday morning worship service. This included the Catholic and five or six Protestant and independent churches. They worshipped in each of their respective churches, taking turns in leading. We frequently attended these meetings. What a joy to see what was happening here and just beginning in other surrounding villages.

What Happens?

Let us go back to the oft repeated question: What happens when still another mission comes to an old overchurched field in Africa and begins to work with independent churches?

Putting it in a simple, summary way, we can again say what we have been trying to express all the way through *THE UYO STORY*. Actually Part II is simply reiteration of Part I, with added illustrations of how it was all working out. So much of our story will remain hidden away in files,³ preserved in mission archives, or in the minds and hearts of the more than fifty of us, who gave of our lives in an effort to understand what God, *today*, is trying to say to His church in mission.

This Is What Happens!

1. There is no mission establishment, but people, Christians, working and witnessing with other believers in Christ.
2. There is no abiding place; but frustration, uncertainty, unsettlement; there are quick, unplanned dislocations.
3. New relationships develop: people with people and people with God.

³ Just a day before we left Uyo, we fortunately were able to send a steel drum, containing nearly fifty important files of records, on an Armels Transport truck, still operating at that time between Uyo and Lagos, though the west end of the Niger bridge was bombed out. At the Niger, goods were being ferried across the river to be reloaded on another Armels truck going to Lagos. Armels was a neutral German or Swiss company. You can imagine our joy when we saw our drum in the warehouse in Lagos, when we arrived a few days later. They are now safe with our Mission Board in Elkhart, Ind.

Edwin Weaver baptizing a young brother — 1963.



COMING BACK?

It didn't seem possible for this to be happening in Nigeria! There were rumblings of war around us. People were tense. The American Consulate in Enugu was requesting all dependents to leave. None of us wanted to go.

There were long moments of silence as we counseled together after an evening prayer fellowship in Ikot Obio Ama. This little mud dwelling had been the scene for other important meetings, and tonight our Uyo families were making decisions of whether to stay or leave.

The next day was Sunday, June 5, 1967. Cliff and Lois Amstutz, and Lela Fern Snyder with their small children, were leaving for Jos, in the north, where the three older Amstutz children were in school. The big station wagon stood ready in front of the house.

The morning service in the village church had just closed, and the congregation had come to say good-bye. We sang a hymn, and read a Psalm, and prayed together with tears. This was such an abrupt ending and one so unexpected. No one could predict the future. We closed the doors to the house. No one has lived there since. This was the beginning of our leaving Eastern Nigeria. It was a painful experience, but wars are never kind. By the end of July all but five of our missionaries had left.¹ The five were staying with the hospital in Abiriba.

None of us will forget God's protecting mercies as we experienced the pressures of uncertainties which accompanied our leaving: the great thanksgiving in the hearts of those who traveled north to Jos, as they realized that the bridge across the Niger had closed only hours after they had made a safe crossing into the Western region; the crowded and uncertain trip along the coast by coastal steamer, as part of our group went to Ghana; the angry mob which surrounded the Lutheran caravan of cars, in which Ed was traveling, as they lost their way one dark night in their escape to Lagos; the dramatic meeting of friends along the road, who opened strictly guarded barricades to the caravan; the assurance that something would work out, as I walked the streets of Lagos trying

¹ Dr. Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger, Cyril and Ruth Gingerich, and Martha Bender.

to find a way to pay for a plane ticket to New York; the quiet remembering with great thankfulness His promise to be with us always — “even unto the end of the world.”

The “Go Slow” sign was still standing at the city limits of Uyo. It had been there all these long eight years. We had deliberately moved slowly. Now we could not see it. We were moving away from the sign too quickly. It was to our backs now. Often in the days that followed, at roadside check stops, at airports, in department stores, by clerks and guards, by officials we were asked, “Are you coming back?” The question burns deeply into our minds. It remains there without an answer.

God knows how much we would like to return, for each of us has left a part of himself in that land with her people.

The Church Stays

We go. The church stays. Sounds bad! Five of our number stayed on in Abiriba after the rest of us left. Why did we go when they were staying?

Anyone has the right to challenge our actions, or perhaps reactions, to the rapidly developing civil war. We have debated in our own consciences the rightness of our decision. We may have made a mistake!

From similar experiences in other countries we knew the risk of political involvement entailed by staying. We also knew that in such a time we would have difficulty in satisfactorily explaining our presence to Government officials. Then, too, we knew the possible embarrassment we could be to the very people we had come to serve. During those last days we repeatedly consulted with our church leaders. They firmly advised us to leave, saying that this is an African palaver in which we had best not be involved. A real part of our dilemma was the type of work in which we were engaged. To continue traveling around in villages meeting our people would have been completely misunderstood — and impossible!

The church stays! We go. Now what? So much about the church is on our minds and hearts. What is happening? We cannot forget the people with whom we worked and worshipped. From here and there a little information is coming through, but not enough to satisfy. There is hunger and suffering; people are separated and scattered; division has disrupted the church; some have even lost their lives.

The church stays but it does not stop. It goes on! Reorganization is taking place. New leaders are arranged. Dick Ekerete has opened a new Bible school in one of the geographically separated areas. In another far area there is O. E. Essiet, ordained a minister on Easter Day of 1967,

just before we left. How happy we are for him, regretting only that more like him were not ordained at that time. The future of the church so much depends on good leadership.

Through suffering, persecutions, trials and temptations of many kinds the church goes on!

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²

The validity of our whole strategy of the church in mission is now being put to test. It was not designed as an easy escape from responsibility when the going got tough. Yes, we left Uyo but not to forget. Our responsibility remains. This cannot be contradicted. Now that we are all out, and for the present can't get back — because of the civil war — this still does not free us from responsibility. We can't just break with the past and forget it all. No, our Mission Board is a responsible organization; and we are responsible representatives.

In relation to our church in Uyo there are three words for us to emphasize. First, there is our **responsibility**. Second, there **must be continuity**. A relation with the church must be reestablished as early as possible; and our support and cooperation must go on. The third word is **possibility**. This is not the end of everything. It is merely the beginning! The future in God's mission is always bright. The problem is to discover where and how God is working. It is there where we also will discover our future mission with the Uyo church!

We Have A Dream

And your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.³

We may now be too old to see visions, but we do have a dream. Here it is:

The mission must always be God's mission.

² Romans 8:38,39.

³ Acts 2:17.

Uyo could become a stepping-stone for wider mission in West Africa. We must learn from Uyo mistakes. Uyo could also be a pattern of mission elsewhere.

Why not work with independent churches along the coast of West Africa as opportunities open?

Any future mission should concentrate on leadership training for independent churches beginning on the congregational level.

We must sit lightly anywhere we go in mission. Uyo has taught us to change, experiment, adjust, evacuate. What happened to us in Uyo presumably could easily happen anywhere in West Africa.

Should not emphasis be given to interchurch teams, involving as many churches as possible?

Because of the immensity of the task and opening doors, should we not work closely with councils, older churches and any organizations eager to participate?

Why not develop "spot missions?" This could be done in small unmissioned areas needing more help than we are prepared to give independent churches. In such missions, three-four man teams might be used, experimenting in new ways of mission. This might make possible more freedom to develop patterns in keeping with our theology and heritage. We believe that we still have a contribution to make to the total witness of the Church in the world.

In West Africa why not work toward developing centers in which a Bible school could be a part, along with other interchurch projects, in which independent churches also can fully participate?

God has more than visionary dreams. He has a definite plan and purpose He is working out.

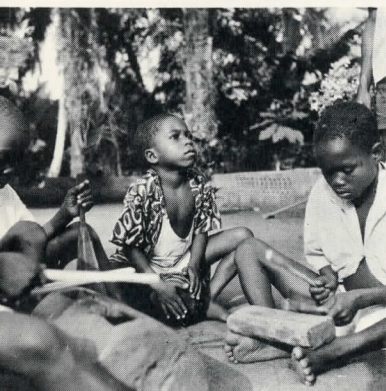
God is working His Purpose out,
As year succeeds to year;
God is working His Purpose out
And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea. ⁴

⁴ Arthur C. Ainger (1841-1919), *Pilgrim Hymnal*, p. 298.

Now we have told you our dream. And we do believe that Uyo was in God's plan — though often so difficult. We also must confess a strong conviction that Uyo is a stepping-stone for other ventures in mission that God has for His church.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ⁵

⁵ II Cor. 5:19.



Patient and nurses at Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital.

A river boat.



Maternity ward (including baby beds) at Abiriba.



The Mennonite Church at Ibianga receiving the offering at a Sunday worship service. Singing, hand clapping and dancing often accompany this part of the service.

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Personnel Evacuated from Eastern Region, Nigeria in 1967

During the summer of 1967, twenty-six of the fifty-four persons appointed to Nigeria, between 1959-1967, by the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1711 Prairie Street, Elkhart, Indiana, were still there, mostly in the Eastern Region. In addition Elizabeth Showalter was serving in Enugu under a separate program sponsored by Lady Ibiam. Just prior to the crisis, Joan Souder and Ruth Ann Miller left on regular furlough. The rest evacuated to the following places:

Direct to the U.S.A :

Charles and Rhoda Hertzler and family, from Abiriba;
Clair and Faye Brenneman and family, from Asaba;
Ed and Irene Weaver, from Uyo.

By car to Jos and later to the U.S.A. during 1967-68:

Clifford and Lois Amstutz and family, from Ikot Obio Ama;
Delbert and Lela Fern Snyder and family, from Etinan;

Truman and Clara Miller returned from Jos in 1968.

The following persons went to Ghana where they completed their terms of service in various mission institutions before returning home:

Stanley and Delores Friesen, from Uyo;
Lloyd and Evelyn Fisher, from Enugu;
Larry Borntrager, from Uyo;
Nelda Rhodes, from Abiriba;
Kenneth Ropp, from Abiriba;
George and Lena Weber, from Abiriba.

Five missionaries stayed on in Abiriba to continue to man the strategic Abiriba Hospital. Cyril and Ruth Gingerich returned to Canada during the summer of 1968. Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger and Martha Bender finally evacuated in October, 1968, after exhaustive experiences ministering to thousands of sick and starving people.

Evacuations are never easy. Each of the above mentioned persons could tell a heartrending story.

A MISSION STRATEGY FOR UYO

by Edwin I. Weaver

Some years ago we were reading much about indigenization of the Church in terms of self-government, self-propagation and self-support. These ideals of mission strategy were designed to develop indigenous churches. Undoubtedly in the past twenty-five years this strategy of mission needed emphasis, and has been a step in the direction of more participation by nationals in the development of their respective churches.

But later missions came to realize that too much emphasis of "self" in indigenization could be a bad thing. Also nationals resented it. A withdrawal of missions and missionaries was not what was wanted. Foreign missions could not quite so easily shed themselves of their responsibility towards the younger churches. Working together in fellowship and cooperation as one body in Christ is better than a separation, with the mission and the church each going their own way.

And now more recently we are reading about mission replacing missions. Just what is implied by mission in current usage may not be too clear; but for one thing it seems to take the emphasis from missions as organizations, giving more attention to the total task and witness of the Church. Missions are many; mission is one. The message of the Gospel is not limited geographically as are mission organizations. Neither is the message of the Gospel limited by any denominational understanding and witness. Many places in the world are closed to mission organizations. But few places would be closed to individual, witnessing Christians working in such countries under some government or business organization. Mission is something bigger than missions.

Some Christians are greatly disturbed by the worldwide trend toward greater unity and ecumenicity. Among some "ecumenicity" is a bad word. Still the movement toward better understanding and closer fellowship is unmistakably gaining strength. Some denominations are uniting; many are negotiating. A new atmosphere is developing between Catholics and Protestants, which is noticeable even in Uyo. Denominationalism is losing some of its hold. There is greater friendliness and openness between members of different churches. All this does not necessarily mean that leaders of widely different theological viewpoints are coming close together. Rather it seems to indicate that differences are more on theological than on

denominational levels. The ordinary layman cares less and less for denominationalism. He is interested in learning to know and understand his fellow-Christian of whatever race or denominational background.

Is Uyo Different?

How much we have been influenced in our Uyo mission strategy by these various changing concepts is difficult to say. It seems to us that the influence of world trends has been more or less unconscious. What has determined our policies more than anything else has been the force of circumstances. Uyo was different from any other mission field our Board has ever entered. It called for an entirely different approach. Why we stayed after we arrived can only be explained by the providence of God, who works in lives and organizations in unpredictable ways.

Uyo is a different mission field, different from any we have ever known. We wonder if there is another like it anywhere in the world. We doubt it! An understanding of what is different here is a preliminary requirement for anyone attempting a mission strategy equal to Uyo. The Uyo story by this time is so well known that one hesitates to say anything more at this point. But, in spite of this, not all is known. Uyo is not an unworked, virgin mission field. The Qua Iboe, Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans have all been here for many years. Earlier Protestant missions observed comity. But now it is a "free-for-all." A recent survey by our Inter-Church Team reveals over 225 congregations within a five-mile radius of the center of Uyo, representing over forty different denominations. And now — Mennonites! Why? It is true that most of these denominations represent the so-called Independent Churches. With just this little information you will understand that Uyo is different, that it required a different mission strategy. This we are trying to work out. Much that we have done has been by way of experimentation. There is little written to guide us and help us in work with Independent Churches.

Our mission began working with the "Independent" Mennonite Church, a scattered group of some fifty churches, back in 1959. First contacts were made in 1958. How they called us you already know. Though they were using our denominational name, they were really no different from any other of the many African Independent Churches. A change of name doesn't actually change the real nature of a Church! Immediately upon arrival we began to identify and work with our newly adopted churches. We traveled around to the various areas and

congregations and were most enthusiastically received according to hospitable African tradition and were showered with gifts and requests to open schools and hospitals. For us newcomers it was most confusing. We have often remembered the sign, "Go Slow Through Uyo." What "our" new churches were asking for was what the older Missions had been giving their churches for all these years. The political, economic, and social elite of Nigeria are almost invariably persons who have been nurtured in the institutions of the older Missions. Schools and hospitals are status symbols. It is naturally assumed that to have status and to receive the good things of life meant that one had to be associated with and receive the amenities that foreign missions alone can give through their many institutions. To make progress one had to be associated with a foreign mission.

As we went about from congregation to congregation trying to understand the real needs of our newly adopted brothers and sisters, it seemed clear that an entirely new approach would have to be worked out. The Mennonite Church in America should not, perhaps, attempt to have the same kind of relation to the Mennonite Church in Nigeria, let us say, that any one of the older Missions have with their African Church. This must be understood by both the church abroad and the church in Africa. One of the reasons for this difference is that "our" Nigeria Church is not the result of our own missionary effort. The churches we are working with were not established by us; they were already here when we arrived. That a different kind of relationship will develop is inescapable.

A second reason for the difference is that we are in a new day of missions. The paternalism of the past is gone; we hope gone forever. Missions and churches must change with the rest of the world. Whatever happens in Africa in the new developing churches must bring freedom, not foreign control — even spiritual. The Church in Africa must be free to develop as the Spirit of God leads here.

Then, in the third place, the Church in Africa must establish its roots in Africa with African fellow-Christians, and not with a foreign church in a foreign land. The Church in Africa must be African. This is not said in criticism of the good work done by the older Missions. Missions in Africa have done great things for God. We have only the highest admiration for the good work done by them. It is merely that we are in a new day. If space permitted much more should be said about the different approach of a new mission from that of the older Missions.

Rather than to build schools and hospitals, of which there are comparatively so many already, at this late date in the history of missions it seemed to us that there were other things we could be doing

within the life of "our" church that would be ever so much more significant and meaningful. As foreign missionaries we became members of the Mennonite Church of Nigeria. We participate in the life of the church and accept whatever role or responsibility they want to give us, without attempting to dominate or control. Only once at the very beginning did we set up any conditions for working with them. We openly declared that we would only work with churches that would accept New Testament standards. Among other things this included monogamous leadership. Out of fifty there were ten congregations left.

How Best Work With An African Independent Church?

Independent Churches are organized around one man, a top leader, usually the founder, who has complete control and runs his church much like a business. He speaks of it as **his** church. The leader's main objective is to get around himself as many congregations as possible, by one trick or another, and in this way increase his income. Local congregations in the various Independent Churches keep changing their affiliation from one leader to another. There is keen competition between leaders of Independent Churches. The more one becomes acquainted with the real inner life of many of these churches, the more one feels that here are lost sheep without a true shepherd.

The older Missions have been saying, "If they want help, let them repent and come back to us. We will help them." But splintered churches rarely come back, even in the West. And they don't in Africa either. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Jesus in an effort to save sinners associated closely with them. We must follow Him and accept the disapproval of the world. Christ died for these other sheep too!

So the problem was how could we work with and best help the church we had come to sponsor? With our limited experience and observation it seemed that there were three things very urgently needed. (1) They needed Bible teaching to help them to good doctrine and practice. (2) They needed better organization. A church built around one man cannot become a good church. Jesus is the head of the Church, not man. (3) Then too they needed well-trained Spirit-led leaders. These three things could do much to change the picture of all the Independent Churches as we see them today.

To state the problems, though a necessary first step, does not solve them. How could we work out our objectives? Procedures had to be worked out which would fit the context in which we were working. We were a part of the church as responsible members. It was expected of us

that we do something. We found our African brethren easy to work with. They readily accepted suggestions that were new to them. Together we had to work out a program and by experiment and by experience find the best answers. Immediately we began with Bible and leadership classes. Quite early we worked out a simple organizational plan followed by a constitution. After some experimentation and changing we organized the church on three levels: the local congregations, areas of local churches working together, and a central, general conference having an executive committee with power to act for conference in the interim between annual conference sessions. Though we are trying to follow our constitution we are working out our organizational problems much by experience as we go along.

We feel that the church is making real progress in doctrine and practice, in organization and leadership. We are working as foreign missionaries within an Independent Church. We are a part of it. Even though we say that we do not control the church in the same way the older Missions have controlled and developed their churches, yet we have a certain influence in the life of the church, which seems not to be resented by our African brethren. On the other hand there is good evidence that they want more missionaries, more of the things that the older Missions have given to their churches. Whether this is good or not is another question.

The fact that we did not open schools and hospitals like other foreign missions is not to be taken as an indication of our lack of interest in the educational and physical needs of people. Meaningful work, good health and good food are all a part of what the Gospel brings to us. Jesus himself not only healed bodies and minds, he sent out his disciples to do the same. So from the time of our arrival we began to give secondary school scholarships to young people. Not all the scholarship holders were wisely chosen, but we now do have an active group of young people, many of whom are genuinely interested in the progress of the church and deeply grateful for what has been done for them. The scholarship program is helping young people and it is helping the church. It is a good investment in the future church.

Institutions are very expensive for small missions such as ours. Furthermore, new developing nations like Nigeria strongly feel that education and health are the responsibility and prerogative of the Government. More and more even the older Missions are being pushed out of these areas of service. This is not to say that in this new day missions cannot or should not cooperate with governments. They should and must find ways to help people with government support and approval. There are so many needs about which the Government is not able to do anything.

In Ikot Obio Ama, six miles out of Uyo, Bob Stauffers have been working a village agricultural program. We have a Mennonite church in this village, but in the agriculture project Catholics, Mennonites, and what have you, are all working together as one community. Every family in the village is involved. Those of us seeing it from the outside are tremendously impressed with this kind of community approach. It will not only economically benefit the Mennonite families in the village, but also the members of the other churches. The project is not being used to proselyte for the Mennonite Church. All the families of the village share and benefit economically, irrespective of denominational affiliation. Bob has initiated similar projects in other villages. He is working closely with the provincial agricultural officers in all these projects. They cooperate with him and very much appreciate what he is doing. They simply do not have enough personnel to do the kind of supervision needed. The agricultural program is not under the control or administration of "our" church, but at the same time the church can and does greatly benefit from what is being done.

Cooperation And Reconciliation

To try and work out a mission strategy equal to Uyo, to disregard the older Missions and start working as if this were a pagan land with few Christians would have been unthinkable! Missions have been in Uyo for nearly one hundred years. Over ninety percent of the people are said to be professing Christians; and as one sees them crowd into the over 200 Uyo church houses on a typical Sunday morning one can well believe that at least one-half of them may well be practicing Christians. Not many similar towns in America could beat this!

Upon our arrival in Nigeria we immediately made contact with leaders of the older Missions to see what help we could get in working out a missions strategy. We also met leaders of the Christian Council Committee of the Eastern Region. What these men thought was clear. They deeply resented our having come to Uyo of all places. It was a painful experience to accept this resentment and go ahead trying to work through to good relationships and a positive mission program. The (Scottish) Presbyterian Church was the first to accept us and do something for us. They even seemed anxious for us to work with the Independents. When we found ourselves unable to get a residential visa they sponsored us to the Government and we began working in an accepted relationship with the Presbyterian Church and the Independent Churches at the same time.

The Presbyterians invited us to become the voluntary agency for a newly developing medical program at Abiriba about 80 miles north of Uyo, where some years ago they had a hospital with Sir Francis Ibiam as the medical officer. In cooperation with the Presbyterians, the community and the Government, we assumed administrative responsibility. Also about that time we began to provide some teachers for their secondary schools. Providing personnel for missions and even for Government institutions became a pattern of the type of mission work our Mission Board was prepared to do in Nigeria. In relation to other missions and agencies we developed what may be called a "supportive role of missions." We were not planning a big program of our own, but rather we were working in and with other mission institutions already established. Most of our personnel in Nigeria have been engaged in this kind of a supportive role. We are convinced that for Nigeria that is legitimate strategy.

By about 1962 still other doors slowly began to open. We presented a plan to the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Nigeria Christian Council Committee. They sanctioned our setting up an unofficial Inter-Church Study Group (I.C.S.G.), which from that time began to meet three or four times a year. Interested persons from ten to fifteen different churches have been attending these meetings. Members of the staff of the Department of Religion of the University of Nigeria have also been taking an active part in the I.C.S.G. While the I.C.S.G. made possible a united study of the problem of the Independent Churches, it also brought together churches that normally have little or no contact with each other, from among both the Christian Council and non-Christian Council groups. This itself can have great value and builds understanding.

Interest in the Study Group continues. In addition to the value of the study papers and discussions, one of the good things resulting is that I.C.S.G. becomes a liaison between the Independent Churches and the Christian Council. In working out of any difficult relationships, a third party usually can be helpful. It can interpret the Independent Churches to the Mission Churches and the Mission Churches to the Independents. There has been much misunderstanding and resentment on both sides.

Out of the Inter-Church Study Group has developed an Inter-Church Team composed of one Presbyterian, one Anglican, two Mennonites and one Independent. The Team is doing survey work among Independent Churches, contacting and working in them as opportunities arise. They also teach in our Uyo Bible College, set up to train leaders of the Independent Churches. The Team's objective is to

actually contact and work with these churches. Recently the Team has led in promoting meetings of many of the Independent Churches to help them discover each other and to find out what they say they want and need.

Rightly or wrongly, we feel that it is the interchurch approach that must be used in work with the many, many Independent Churches around Uyo, who are left as sheep without a shepherd. A denominational approach is **not** the answer. We have much to learn, but if we let Him, God will lead us and help us to find His way!

What Independent Churches Need

So far we have been mostly concerned with clarifying our strategy of working with "our" Independent Mennonite Church and our relationship and supportive role in work with Mission Churches. But there are perhaps hundreds of Independent Churches. How shall we approach and work with them? What do they need? What are our objectives? Final answers will have to come after much more experience, but tentatively we are saying that they have three basic needs. First, they need much Bible teaching; second, they need better organization; and third, they need better leadership. More Bible teaching will help them to better doctrine. More Bible teaching and better organization is contingent on better leaders. Bible trained and spirit-filled leaders are needed to teach the Bible to the masses. The leader is an important key to the future of Independent Churches.

To train Independent Church leaders, two years ago we established in Uyo **The United Churches Bible College**. Why "United?" Our Mennonite Church was too small to operate a good Bible College. We would not have enough students. Still more important is our overall objective of contacting and working with as many Independent Churches as possible. As a mission we could have started a Bible School of our own and still invited students from among the many Independent Churches. And we could have used such a Bible School to quickly develop a really **big** Mennonite Church in Nigeria. Many Independent Churches keep applying to be accepted. Though we are interested in helping them, we are not interested in using the religious confusion of Uyo to develop a large Mennonite Church.

The United Churches Bible College is administered through the Fellowship. This is better even though most of the finances come through our Board. A school board has been set up in which there are representatives from each of the member churches of the Fellowship. We accept students from other than Fellowship churches. This year we

have applications from many more prospective students from among the Independent Churches of many kinds. In some cases these are leaders of Independent Churches themselves.

The problem of the many, many (no one yet knows how many) Independent Churches has to be faced realistically by someone. Whose responsibility are they? What in the end do we hope to accomplish? Should we merely help them to better doctrines, better leaders, better organization and leave it at that, letting them continue on as small Independent Churches? No, this can't be the answer either.

Many Independent Churches have only a few congregations. Their leaders cannot possibly develop them into good churches. Many such leaders have little or no education and no training whatever. They are seeking help for themselves and their churches wherever they can get it, writing hundreds of letters to whatever foreign addresses they can get hold of. This is not the answer to their problems. Neither is it right for us living right here in their midst to do nothing to help solve the problem of the Independent Churches. We have a responsibility. Some missions are beginning to be interested. But attitudes on the part of both the Independent Churches and the Mission Churches need some changing. So far two things seem quite clear to us. One, the Independent Churches are the responsibility of all of us working together and not of any one mission taking a denominational approach. Two, leadership training is one of the keys to the solution of the problems.

If we build up one Independent Church we almost have to do it at the expense of another. This means continuing the already common practice of proselyting. This too is not the answer. If we want to encourage them to unite or join with other large churches, then which church shall we encourage them to join? Our own Mission Churches? Other larger Independent Churches?

Independent Churches will readily join the new Mission Churches. In fact, that is what they are looking for, some new Mission that will come and take them over and support them too, like the older Missions do their churches. Many, if not all, of the newer Missions got their start in just this way. We began by sponsoring one or more of the Independent Churches. We justified ourselves, but the older Mission Churches were greatly offended. One can hardly blame them. If the newer Missions would sufficiently understand the background and real needs of these churches they work with, it may not be too bad. But if our objective is merely to establish still other denominations or Mission Churches I can see little good coming from it. More denominations for the Independents cannot be the answer. It is a knotty problem.

At present the best thing that I can see clearly is to begin contacting and working with these churches (and this does not mean that we accept everything they are and do) with the hope that a relationship will develop so that we can help them work out their future. It is clear they want help. They want wider Christian fellowship. What they don't yet see is the possibility of finding this help and fellowship right here in Africa! We must still help the African Christians to find their roots in Africa. I think that it is entirely realistic to expect that a fellowship of good Independent Churches can develop which will be enough alike in doctrine and practice that together they can be represented, let us say, on the Christian Council Committee of Eastern Nigeria. Let any uniting of Independent Churches work out as the Spirit of God leads!

The Future

One can plan and work toward future goals. But this has to be done in light of past experience and with as wide a knowledge of facts involved as possible. However, while gaining experience and knowledge we must keep on planning and working with what we have. On the basis of this, certain procedures are suggested which will indicate possible directions we can go. These can be changed or corrected as more experience makes this advisable.

1. We have a closer relation to the Independent Mennonite Church than to any other. We believe that what has happened so far is right and justifies what we are doing. We want to continue in this direction. There are dangers and pitfalls ahead which we must try to avoid. The chief of these is the temptation to develop another large, foreign-oriented Mission Church.
2. Our relation to other Independents is different. It is different by designed strategy. We feel that to relate to different Independent Churches on different levels gives us advantages of some experimentation to try to discover the best ways of working with these churches. Here the danger seems more on the side of doing too little so that little is really accomplished. They receive too little help. All Independent Churches want more, not less help. More experience in working with them will give us guidance for future development of work.

3. Mission churches and the larger and more stable of the Independent Churches could be encouraged to take interest in certain of the smaller groups to see what they can do for them. We believe that this ought to be tried and we think has real possibilities. They might begin contacting them, preaching for them, working with them, much as Christ did with the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
4. The Inter-Church Study Group is making a significant contribution to the understanding of Independent Churches, and incidentally, of each other. It provides good opportunities for a reconciling fellowship all around. It needs to carry on and be still further developed. It has real possibilities.
5. The Inter-Church Team has two main objectives. One is to survey certain limited key areas to gain information as to the origin and historical development of the churches in the survey area. The other is to make contact with and represent our work to the many Independents. The task is so immense and we have just really begun. Many more interested persons will have to take part in this work if we are really to accomplish much.
6. Let me state again with real conviction, the secret of whatever the Independent Churches can become lies in their leadership. In the social structure of African people so much depends on the top leaders. People follow their leaders naturally and easily. They move as groups, but they do not move without leaders. A good training for leaders will do much to prepare better leadership, and we believe will result in better churches. It will not be easy to get some of the Independent Churches out of the clutches of unscrupulous men. But there are leaders who want help and there are people who know the difference between a bad and a good leader. So there is hope. The training of leaders is of prime strategical importance.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

by Edwin I. Weaver

1. The Key to Understanding

Leadership is one of the keys to an understanding of what Independent Churches are, and what by the grace of God they can become. Many leaders of these churches are untrained, unqualified, even illiterate; too many are self-appointed, unscrupulous men, who make the collection of churches around themselves a gainful business and occupation. Any worthwhile leadership training program must take this background into consideration.

In contrast to this, the Older Mission Churches have, by and large, well-educated, and well-trained pastors. This, however, is not the whole story. Though there is a well-trained ministry in the Older Mission Churches, most of these men are responsible for so many congregations that about all they can do is to go around their large parishes from center to center administering the sacraments and the work of the Church, so that little or no real pastoral work is possible. Consequently, the end result is much the same in both the Older Mission Churches and the new Independent Churches. In both the masses of church members are left without adequate pastoral care. The Church that will provide an adequate ministry for people on the congregational level will win the hearts of the people. One of the reasons that the Older Mission Churches have lost heavily to the Newer Mission and Independent Churches may well be because they have lacked a pastoral and teaching ministry on the congregational level.

Whatever we may say about the Older Mission Churches, no one will seriously question the statement that at the heart of the problems facing all Independent Churches is the leadership question. Though not the only problem, certainly a major issue is the preparation of a better spiritually and educationally qualified leadership. Working with Independent Churches one is deeply impressed by the prevalent strong desire among them for just this kind of leadership.

Dr. H. W. Gensichen, until recently Director of Theological Education Fund was already saying of Africa in an article in the April 1963 issue of the *International Review of Missions*, "In no other continent is there such a grave danger that educational standards of pastors and theological students will fall hopelessly behind the rapid

development of education as a whole," p. 155. If this is being said about the Older Mission Churches, what must we say about leadership in the Independent Churches? Our limited experience reveals a deplorably low educational standard. A saving feature in many of these churches may well be the keen desire for progress and a better leadership. They too are well aware of the limitations of an untrained and poorly qualified leadership. Their acceptance as good Churches, in part at least, hinges on this issue.

II. Levels and Kind of Leadership Training

A second problem that has to be faced, in planning theological and leadership training for Independent Churches, has to do with the level and kind of training these churches need. It simply cannot be taken for granted that traditional Western patterns of leadership are best suited for African Independent Churches, or for any Church in Africa for that matter. It can easily be conceded that leadership training at the top level to qualify men for the spiritual and administrative functions of the Church must have top priority. However, it needs also to be said that any neglect of leadership training on other levels, right down to the local congregations, is a grave mistake. Losses to the Older Mission Churches are, in part, due to a lack of a teaching and pastoral ministry on the local level.

The rapidly rising level of education in Nigeria demands better local church leaders to hold the interest of the increasing number of educated young people. This creates the problem of support. The only immediate answer to this problem is to help them develop a "tent-making" ministry. This is being done in other parts of Africa. We are just beginning to experiment with it in our Uyo Bible College. We think that it has possibilities. Even if they wished, we know that most village churches cannot adequately support a well-trained leader. The best answer to the problem would be for the half dozen churches one finds in many villages to join together to form **one** good church with good leadership.

There is still another problem that theological education must face. It is agreed that the training of a leadership competent to minister to the spiritual needs of people is basic. This is where we begin; but it is not where we end. Members in local congregations need spiritual help and counsel, but they need more. The African does not separate his life into neat categories of religious, social, physical and economic compartments like we tend to do. Presumably, the African Christian has given up his old tribal life, where all his needs were met, and in

which he formerly found his security. He now belongs to a new tribe — the Tribe of Christ (as John V. Taylor puts it in *The Primal Vision*). Taylor also says, "There are many leader figures in the African scene — kings, chiefs, elders, and headmen, priests, diviners and oracles, rain makers, doctors and herbalists."

In the old tribal life the African could turn to any of these "specialists" in time of deep personal need. To whom now can the African Christian turn? The pastor? Perhaps. The missionary? The mission hospital? Perhaps. But what actually is happening is that many members of even the Older Churches, in times of crises, go back to their diviners and healers. This is especially true in times of illness. This is a more common practice than many are aware of. The Church has the tremendous responsibility of training a leadership which will adequately replace the leader figures of older African cultures.

The question then follows: Can even highly trained and widely educated persons ever become a full substitute for all the leader-figures who could minister to the needs of people in the older cultures? In view of their already over-loaded schedules of administration of the Church and its sacraments, it is not likely that many pastors will be able to broaden their ministry to other areas, or teach capable laymen to help in such ministries. What will happen is that people will continue to be without an adequate ministry and will continue to become an easy prey to various sects or revert to old tribal practices. Therefore, the Church that most effectively meets the needs of the people will win the hearts of the people.

Could the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal Churches in the world in part be accounted for, not only by a greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit, but also by the greater diversity of leadership provided by Pentecostal Churches, according to the gifts of the Spirit? In I Corinthians 12:4-11 Paul lists the varieties of ministries in the Church which the Spirit makes possible. "Now there are . . . all these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." And the different kind of leaders exercising these gifts are summarized in I Corinthians 12:28 and also in Paul's letter to the Ephesians in 4:11. The question may be asked: are we expecting too much of one, even highly trained pastor in the ministry of building up the Church to maturity in Christ? Can all the necessary gifts of the Spirit be found in one person? Do not many more leaders with different kinds of gifts need to be involved in the total ministry of the Church? The answer to these questions seems obvious.

One would certainly agree with much that Sundkler and others have written about the ministry in Africa. But questions still have to be asked and answers sought. Is higher training of top leaders or pastors the sole answer? Is this even the most strategic approach to the problems facing African Independent Churches? Is not the training of gifted lay leaders and a diversity of leadership even more fitting to African cultural patterns? The answer here is perhaps not an either/or, but rather a both/and. Whether these questions are fully valid or not, reality must be faced. African village congregations are not able to fully support a highly trained ministry. For years to come the Church will have to heavily depend on dedicated lay leaders, who will be partly or wholly self-supporting. So in preference to giving sole emphasis to more highly trained pastors much thought and effort must go into the study and training of lay leadership that will make possible a fuller ministry to local congregations. And this must be combined with an emphasis on diversity of leadership. We must seek to involve more people in the total ministry of the Church.

III. Cultural Issues in Leadership Training

African schools of Bible and theology have closely followed traditional Western thought patterns and denominational interpretation with little attempt to understand and teach theology in African thought patterns. Perhaps it is impossible for a Western-trained African or expatriate to do otherwise.

Don Jacobs, in a paper entitled, "Biblical-theological-cultural Issues in Leadership Training," says, "Theology is essentially the process of seeking in Scriptures the answer to our questions." Our theologies are written in Western thought patterns that are cultural. Some of the problems which the Church faces in Africa arise because we are perpetuating much that is foreign to this land. There is a rapidly growing number of separatist or independent churches. Jacobs further says, "The one basic assumption that all these groups accept is that Christianity is foreign and that they are called to make it 'African.' Is this racial pride and bigotry? It may be, but again it may not be. They are doing something that the Church here should have been doing for years, that is, seeking answers to their questions in their own categories of thought. The Separatist Movement is a crystal clear sign that the Church has failed to lose its foreignness. For many Christianity represents someone else's answers to someone else's questions."

Theological colleges are largely Western and denominationally oriented. Can they, therefore, give the kind of leadership training that will meet the need of African Independent Churches? This is the problem. Answers to it ought to be sought. This much is clear to me. The answers will not be found by one Mission or Church doing it alone. We are too much a part of our Western and religious cultures to do effectively what needs to be so urgently done. The best answers will not be found in a denominational or one-mission approach, nor yet by a Westerner or an African working alone. This is a new day for the Church in the world. More and more our answers must be sought and found in the wider context of the total Church, in closer fellowship and working together, in better understanding of each other and our different religious cultures.

In finding the answers to the problems we face in our work with Independent Churches we seek your help and counsel.

REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE (ad hoc)

The Committee met on February 11, 1967 in Uyo. This report is the revision resulting from the subsequent Inter-Church Study Group meeting of Feb. 25, 1967.

Devotional

I. *Review of Objectives*

Previous objectives were reviewed and adopted as follows:

1. To establish a "group approach" in making studies of churches in Eastern Nigeria, a problem common to all of us;
2. To encourage Older Mission Churches to take a genuine interest in the needs of the Independent Churches;
3. To encourage some of the leaders of Independent Christian Churches to participate in the studies and the fellowship of our Group; and to invite some of them to present papers;
4. To approach and to really work with Independent Churches through our Inter-Church Team; and to encourage the churches and organizations we represent to make direct contact with any of the Independent Churches they may wish, even though this is very difficult in some instances;
5. To work in close cooperation with E.R.C.;
6. To work with Nsukka's Department of Religion and other organizations in establishing a research centre for persons interested in depth studies, who would still be welcome to cooperate with and attend the Inter-Church Group meetings;
7. To work towards integration of Independent Churches for participation in the witness of the total church in Nigeria; also to lead Independent Churches to work out definite statements of doctrine and practices, and a constitution.

II. *Organization*

The enclosed chart shows the organization and the various relationships as reorganized.

III. *The Inter-Church Group Committee*

It is recommended that the Committee for the Group be made up as follows: Organizer, Assistant Organizer, two Presbyterians, two Anglicans, two from Independent Churches, one Lutheran, one from the Christian Council Committee, and one from Nsukka, making a total of eleven members.

It is further recommended that this committee continue the original plan of contacting the W.C.C. through E.R.C. for funds to develop our work. And that E.R.C. delegate authority to this committee for any funds that may come from W.C.C. All grants to come through and be accounted for through E.R.C.

IV. *Inter-Church Team*

The Team will be responsible to the committee, which will direct its policies.

V. *Independent Churches Leaders Meeting*

This meeting to continue as a separate body from the Inter-Church Group until such time when a better understanding between the two bodies can be developed, and a better basis be found for discussion of mutual problems. The Mennonite Mission continue to act as a bridge between the two bodies.

VI. *Theological Education Fund*

Control and administration of this fund to be taken over by the Committee (of this organization).

VII. *Independent Churches Bible College*

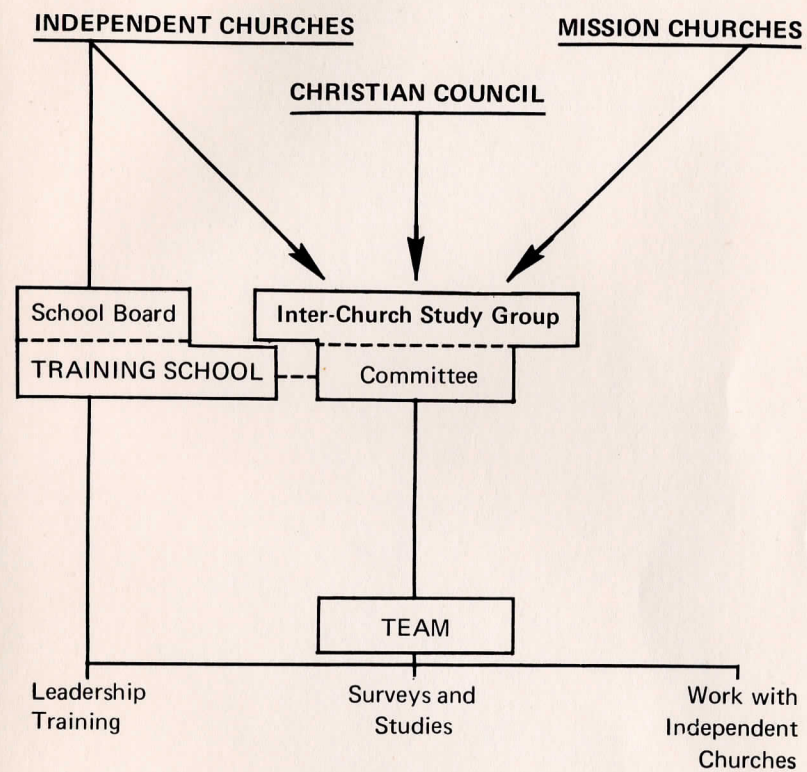
It was recommended that the Inter-Church Group sponsor the school; and that both the Independent Churches and the Inter-Church Group be represented on its governing body, but that the Independent Churches actually control and direct the policies of the school.

VIII. *Suggestions:*

1. That E. I. Weaver be invited to meet with the various Older Mission Churches in their synods and conferences to give information about our work with Independent Churches, in order that they too may better understand them;
2. That E. I. Weaver call an **ad hoc** meeting of representatives of the Older Mission Churches for further discussion of the problems in our relation to the Independent Churches. For this meeting two representatives each, from the Methodist Church, Port Harcourt District, the Methodist Church, Calabar District, the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, and four each from the Q.I.C. and Presbyterian Churches.

E. I. Weaver
Organizer

ORGANIZATION AND RELATIONSHIP





Edwin and Irene Weaver responded to a call to come to Nigeria in 1959 to help a group of independent churches who had of their own accord adopted the name "Mennonite."

The authors tell with candor and charity some of the early disillusionments and frustrations which gradually yielded place to a new vision of opportunities. It was a vision which challenged them and the church to take new risks and attempt new approaches. It was a vision which sustained them and their colleagues through the inevitable rough spots, and which gave them courage to face opposition and misunderstanding.