

TRAINING WORKERS IN SISTER CHURCHES WITHOUT THE PRESENCE  
OF RESIDENT EXPATRIATE MISSIONARIES

A Different Kind of Mission Field

If all our world mission fields were like those from which we have representation at this conference, the topic under consideration would not have been assigned. As a matter of fact, however, the fields in which we are working are not all alike. One important difference is that there are several in which we do not have and very likely will never have resident missionaries.

Cameroon is one of these. Our first contacts with this field go back to 1970 when President Naumann received a plea from the church there for assistance. The first visit by a WELS representative was made in December 1971. Two more visits, one of them by a three man team, were made the following year. An in-depth visit by the same three men in February 1975 resulted in a report and recommendation to the WELS convention of that year on the basis of which the Synod resolved to send two missionaries to Cameroon. This resolution was never implemented. The problem is that before a church in Cameroon can invite a foreign church body to send missionaries to assist in developing its program, the church must have registration with the national government. Though the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the United Republic of Cameroon has provincial recognition and permission to operate, it has to date not been able to achieve national registration. Since, we are told, no other church has succeeded in being registered since Cameroon became independent some years ago, it does not seem likely that we will have resident missionaries there in the foreseeable future.

We have a somewhat different situation in Nigeria, although the end result is much the same. The status of Christ the King Lutheran Synod is that of a sister church rather than that of a mission in the usual sense of the word. It is made up of nine congregations which left the Lutheran Church of Nigeria in the late 1960's because of its increasing involvement in unionistic practices and because of a growing laxity in practice, particularly in respect to polygamy. Through contacts over a period of some ten years, first by mail, then through Pastor E. U. Eshiett's attendance at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1974, and finally by means of several visits by WELS representatives to Nigeria, it was established that this small church body stands confessionally where the former Synodical Conference stood. This was not surprising since for the most part the congregations forming this small synod were among those founded and served by our Wisconsin Synod missionaries. Our WELS convention in August 1981 recognized that these are our spiritual children and adopted a declaration of fellowship with Christ the King Lutheran Synod. Since the CKLS is small and has only three pastors and two evangelists, it is in need of some form of counsel and assistance as it carries out its work. Yet for a number of reasons it is not likely that we will be sending resident missionaries to Nigeria.

Situations such as these are not entirely new to us. We have been involved in a mission program for Mexico since 1968. Yet we have never been able to place permanent missionaries inside the country. We accepted responsibility for work in India in 1969 in spite of the fact that resident status for missionaries was and still is not available to us. For years we were without an expatriate missionary presence in Indonesia and Taiwan but had to content ourselves with more or less regular visits by the Friendly Counselor who was resident in Hong Kong.

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In all of this there is a common denominator. In each case there is a young national church served by one or more national called workers. In each instance our Synod resolved to provide counsel and assistance, yet without being able to work through resident WELS missionaries. Some may question whether this was wise. Yet we are there, and in each case we became involved only after considerable study and thought by the Synod and its Board for World Missions.

#### How Have We Been Doing It?

This being the case, we need to ask particularly in the light of the theme and thrust of this World Seminary Conference whether we are serving these areas properly. Are we providing the guidance which these young churches and their workers need? More specifically, what have we done or what are we doing to provide these workers with that which they need if they are to be apt to teach?

It appears that in the case of Mexico and India and previously Taiwan and Indonesia we have been operating with programs which are similar to each other. The Friendly Counselor in Hong Kong made periodic visits to each of the three fields assigned to him. He did exactly what his title implied. He counseled with the church and particularly with its workers. He dealt with the full range of activities in which these workers were involved, Bible study, sermon preparation, finances, and various practical matters. Yet I do not believe that we can say that these were formal, structured programs to give additional training to these workers. The visits made by the Friendly Counselor for Mexico were carried out in much the same way except that in addition there were periodic conferences attended by all the Mexican pastors.

#### A Special Need In Cameroon

In Cameroon we did not have the services of a Friendly Counselor who was more footloose than the other missionaries in the field. There was the additional difficulty that Cameroon is not easily reached from any of our established mission fields including the one in Central Africa. Yet the need of the Cameroonian pastors and evangelists for counsel and guidance is particularly great. Most of them have come out of sectarian background and came into the Lutheran Church with not too much more than the equivalent of an adult instruction course. Even the two original pastors who came from Nigeria were far from being accomplished theologians.

For a number of years whatever guidance these men received came during the course of visits made by missionaries from Zambia and Malawi and by persons from the U.S.A. Already in 1972 it was the opinion of the visiting team that the heart of any assistance program for Cameroon short of having resident missionaries would have to be an ongoing series of worker training sessions, preferably of monthlong duration and conducted two or three times a year.

It was not until 1979, however, that the first formal worker training sessions were carried out for the pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the United Republic of Cameroon. Two subsequent seminars were conducted, each of two or three weeks duration. Instructors in each case were Professor E. H. Wendland and Central Africa Superintendent R. G. Cox.

The most recent of these was in August 1981. Four courses were taught.

1. Bible study covering 17 chapters of 1 Samuel

2. Doctrine, "The Last Things." The text used was Book IV of the LCCA Bible Institute course.
3. A review of homiletics
4. A course on teaching with special emphasis on the use of Luther's Small Catechism

The four pastors taking the course were encouraged in turn to conduct similar courses for the evangelists serving the ELC-URC.

#### Developing a Program for Nigeria

The foregoing became the pattern for a similar program for Nigeria. Already in its report to the 1979 WELS convention the Interim Committee of the Board for World Missions reported that it was planning an ongoing, regular, in-depth worker training program involving "regular, periodic one or two month training visits by possibly two men especially qualified to carry out such a program."

A two-man field visit was made in 1980 to lay the groundwork for a subsequent worker training seminar. In its report to the 1981 Synod convention the Interim Committee stated, "Principal among the needs of this church recognized already several years ago is a program by which the ministry in the church can be strengthened. It is essential, if we are to give the church in Nigeria the help it needs, that at the earliest possible date a program of periodic training seminars be carried out first of all for its called workers and then possibly also for certain of its lay leaders. These seminars need to be conducted on location so that those holding the seminars can better understand and address the needs of the church."

The first such worker training program was carried out this past December. Instructors were E. H. Wendland and T. A. Sauer. Following is their report of the seminar.

*After assessing the situation (in the church in general) and following discussions with the pastors and evangelists we devoted ten days of our visit to the worker training seminar. This was all we could allow because of other meetings and the scheduling of the Synod convention during our stay.*

Participants were: Pastors Eshiett, Akbakpan, Ekpo, Evangelists Ndaeyo and Umanah.

Classes were held each day in the following subjects:

1. Bible Study, Exodus 1-16, based on the Isagogics Notes, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Wendland).
2. Dogmatics, The Doctrine of God and Man, Lessons I to VI, based on the church doctrine course prepared at the Lutheran Bible Institute, Central Africa (Sauer).
3. Homiletics, based on the study course prepared at the Lutheran Seminary, Central Africa. The basic principles of sermon preparation were discussed (Wendland).
4. Practical Theology, based on the course prepared at the Lutheran Bible Institute, Central Africa, Lessons I to VI. The course led into discussions on various topics concerning practical work not specifically treated in these chapters, particularly baptism, giving an insight into the practice of Christ the King Lutheran Synod (Sauer).

Attendance was perfect even though the men cycled many miles each day into Abak where the sessions were held in the local church. Participation was active and interest was good. Both pastors as well as evangelists gave evidence of having received a good basic training in the LCN under conservative teachers. There was full agreement on all matters of doctrine and practice which came up for discussion, including polygamy and infant baptism concerning which we had some questions.

A beginning was made. It is very important that this type of program be continued, and that we supply the impetus and guidance for this. The pastors need to refresh and increase their knowledge. The evangelists will need much further training in order to qualify as pastors. We, too, still need to learn much more about their preaching and teaching ministry as well as other aspects of their work.

Provisions were made for the men to continue their study of the Bible, of church doctrine, and of sermons through materials which we have supplied. We have encouraged them strongly to meet every week for this purpose, to give us regular reports of their progress, and to consult us concerning questions or needs which arise.

Much time on this trip had to be spent assessing the situation and taking part in meetings connected with the annual convention of Christ the King Lutheran Synod. This should not be necessary on every visit. It would be well if a follow-up visit be by a team which could concentrate even more on this worker-training program, also arranging to observe as much as possible of the practical work at first hand.

Plans should be made immediately for such a follow-up visit especially with the view of the time factor and the personnel involved.

#### Where Do We Go From Here?

In evaluating the Cameroon and Nigeria seminars the Board for World Missions has come to the conclusion that more intensive work of this kind has to be done in areas in which we have no resident expatriate missionaries. In report-into to the 1982 district conventions the board states, "These seminars are still in their formative stages, but give promise of being the only viable means of providing valuable training for workers with whom we can not have day-to-day personal contact."

There are problems. Principal among these is that of staff. To date we have had to ask men to take time from other pressing duties and responsibilities, and it appears that for some time we shall have to continue making use of men such as this. If, however, we are serious about guiding and assisting churches in areas in which we can not place resident missionaries, we shall have to provide the staff needed to give the program the attention it deserves.

Under serious consideration for proposal to the next Synod convention is a plan under which a man would be called to the World Mission Division office who together with the executive secretary and the respective executive committees would plan and coordinate the program. At the same time a corps of instructors would be gathered on whom he could call and who would accompany him as needed on these seminars. This corps would be drawn from the following.

1. Missionaries serving areas similar to the one in which the seminar is to be held.

2. Former missionaries who have demonstrated a special aptitude for work of this kind.
3. Professors from our Synod's worker training schools who have demonstrated the ability to present complex subject matter in a simple, clear manner.

Still to be determined is a proper timetable for such seminars. Where the ministry of the national church is well established and its workers properly trained, an intensive annual two or three week training session may suffice. Where this is not the case, more frequent seminars coupled with other field visit activities are indicated. At the moment we consider an annual seminar for Nigeria to be the bare minimum. The same would appear to be true also of India and Mexico. The needs in Cameroon are such that training sessions ought to be on a more frequent schedule. In all cases the timing must be kept under review and adjustments made as circumstances may indicate.

#### Some Summary Thoughts

1. It is essential that wherever we are carrying on a mission program or assisting a young national church, we train national workers so that they may be "apt to teach."
2. This is especially true in areas which we are not able to serve with resident expatriate missionaries.
3. A regular, ongoing worker training seminar program similar to that begun in Cameroon and Nigeria offers what appears to be the only viable means of providing training for the workers in such areas.
4. Curricula need to be developed and necessary staff be made available.
5. Minimal staff would be a man called for this purpose together with part-time volunteer service bymen who have demonstrated a special ability to do work of the kind involved in world mission worker training.
6. Needs of the various fields must be kept under constant review and the frequency and makeup of the seminars adjusted to meet these needs.
7. All of this will require substantial effort on the part of all concerned. It is difficult, on the other hand, to see how we can meet our responsibilities over against these fields with anything less.
8. The Lord's blessing will attend these efforts even as He places it on every proper use of His Word. In that confidence let us do the work He has set before us.

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