



Mission News

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September 21, 2019



Dear Partners in Mission,

Greetings from Ghana, West Africa!

"Where Are All of the Young People?"

It's a long story, but years ago, the LCMS worked with the Lutheran Church of Nigeria to send Nigerian pastor, Rev. Samuel Essien to a far away, small, mostly Muslim African country to help establish the Lutheran church there.

Rev. Essien served as a missionary for ten years. He established three congregations, two preaching stations, one Lutheran primary school and two nursery schools. I had the privilege of visiting Rev. Essien and his family several times during those years.

When Rev. Essien completed his missionary work and returned to Nigeria, he took some time off just to be "home" with his family in his home village. It was there that he realized the church at home was in trouble!

Ten years before, when he left, the church was "teeming" with young people. On his return, they were gone! Now, on Sunday mornings, there were very few young people in worship.

It wasn't long until Rev. Essien was on his way to serve a congregation in another part of Nigeria. When he arrived at his new congregation, he couldn't believe it! There weren't any young people in worship there either. He asked his new members about the situation. The members told him that the young people were "there", but they didn't know why they didn't come to worship.

During this time, I was coordinating and instructing a group of Nigerian pastors through a M.A. in Christian Outreach degree program (with Concordia University, Saint Paul). Rev. Essien was one of these pastors. We went to work on his problem of the missing young people.

Rev. Essien's initial assumptions were that young people stopped coming to worship because

of sporting events and other activities that were now being scheduled on Sundays. Likewise, he was concerned that the church's young people were being lured away by a multitude of social problems affecting young people.

Through a series of interviews (he interviewed 69 people), he discovered that 1) family devotions were not taking place, 2) there was very little evidence of God's Word impacting daily life in member's homes, 3) the previous pastors had not demonstrated any interest in the youth in sermons or other church activities. Finally, 4) although church members were lamenting that young people were no longer coming to church. No one was doing anything about it.

Based on things he learned in his interviews, Rev. Essien started a program he called "On Eagle's Wings". He dedicated one evening a week for this program. The young people, their families and everyone was invited for devotions, topics for young people, Bible study and fun and games.

In addition to the group activities, this program and the interviews gave Rev. Essien a lot of one-on-one time with the young people. In the end, 90% of that congregation's young people returned to worship (and general attendance grew as well).

In August, Rev. Essien passed his thesis defense for the Master of Arts in Christian Outreach degree. I spent countless hours working with him in this endeavor. Our greatest joy (his and mine) is knowing that those who had been lost, are now back in God's Word and are once again worshipping our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ with the family of faith.

Thank you for your prayers for the church in West Africa and for our missionary endeavors!

David and Joyce