

04 February 2010

**CHURCH OF NIGERIA MISSIONARY SOCIETY (CNMS) – MISSION
ARM OF THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA**

From 4th to 8th July 1994, a Provincial Missions Conference was held in Jos, Nigeria. By the end of that gathering, the Conference took a decision to recommend to the Episcopal Synod, the need for the Church of Nigeria to establish a Missionary Body. At the Standing Committee of September 1994 at Eruwon in Ijebu Diocese, this recommendation was ratified. During the Standing Committee held in Akure, this Body was established as an Independent and indigenous Missionary Body, to be supported from within and by the Church of Nigeria. On the 15th of September 1996, at the Cathedral Church of Lagos, the Church of Nigeria Missionary Society was inaugurated with an eighteen-person Executive Council. One Professor Jerry Gana was the first Chairman of that Council.

The Mandate and Aim

The Mandate and Aim of the CNMS were as follows:

- a. To select, train and send-forth Mission Partners to unreached parts of Nigeria, Africa and the world.*
- b. To co-ordinate Missionary efforts of the Church and organise evangelistic Outreaches.*
- c. To mobilise, train and empower the laity to effectively participate in Evangelism.*
- d. To promote and encourage consistent and sustained Prayer Support for Mission and Evangelism.*
- e. To create awareness for various areas of Mission and facilitate their execution through radio, television, film and print media.*
- f. To mobilise support and raise funds for Mission and Evangelism in Nigeria, Africa and beyond.*
- g. To carry out appropriate research to reveal the nature, composition and geographical extent of unreached people-groups in Nigeria, Africa and beyond.*

Organisational Set Up

It was also envisaged that the CNMS will have the following organisational set-up:

- a. An Executive Council made up of two representatives from each of the fourteen (14) ecclesiastical provinces of the Church of Nigeria.*
- b. Provincial Committees.*
- c. Diocesan Committees to carry out the aims at all levels.*

Membership

Membership was, (and is still), by belonging to the Church of Nigeria in any particular Diocese; particularly for all the members who are committed to Mission and Evangelism, either through PRAYER, PARTICIPATION in field work of Mission and Evangelism and SACRIFICIAL GIVING of time, talent and money or materials for Mission and Evangelism. In effect every member of the Church of Nigeria is a member of the CNMS – because it is the Mission arm of the Church. There is no formal ‘application and acceptance’ and no register of members. It is expected that being a member of the Church of Nigeria means one is a member and supporter of CNMS.

CMS (U.K.) was supportive and had funded the CNMS during the early days. This was to enable CNMS set up shop. CMS even gave some training for the officers and Council Members through their Recruitment and Training Department. These gestures and assistance were very useful to CNMS. It was during this time that the CNMS appointed the first Director for Mission and Evangelism.

CNMS therefore is a creation of the Church of Nigeria and it is expected that it should receive both moral and financial support from the Church of Nigeria.

Right from the start CNMS became involved in recruiting and training Mission Partners to be used internally in many parts of the country where they were needed. For this to work, CNMS had to interact with Bishops of various Dioceses discovering where they could send already trained Mission Partners. This system did not lead to sustained work of the Mission Partners. Some Bishops decided to ordain some of these Mission Partners and retained them in their Dioceses as permanent staff. Others who accepted Mission Partners did not really know what to do with them. They found them jobs where some of the M.P.s had no interest. This led to frustration for some of them. Within a few years the number of MPs dwindled.

Another added problem was in the area of funding. The main source for funding the CNMS was through levies given to Dioceses. It was decided at that time that Dioceses should support the CNMS with an annual sum of Twenty Thousand Naira (N20,000.) This we knew was not going to be enough to carry on the envisaged work, but at least it was to form a constant financial base. Like all such arrangements, not all the Dioceses saw the need to fund an outfit they

were not making use of –and of which the real purpose wasn't quite clear to them.

What were the reasons?

1. Perhaps at its inception, some Dioceses neither shared the vision, nor understood the practical implementation of the whole concept of CNMS. This was evident in the fact that some Bishops, in those days, directed the inquiries of people who had interest in working with the CNMS, as Mission Partners, to the Africa Desk of the Church Mission Society (CMS) in London.
2. Perhaps another reason was the fact that some Dioceses had their own Mission and Outreach programmes where they invested lots of money. For this reason, they did not see any need for relying on any other 'body' like CNMS to do Mission with, or for them.

In effect, only those who understood, or who wanted to be 'helpful', paid their levies. So not only were the levies not coming in the way the CNMS expected, the amount of the levy was equally low for all that CNMS was expected to achieve. This arrangement has since been changed and we are exploring other ways of fund raising. CNMS tries to raise funds from other sources to augment what comes in from the Dioceses. This means that the CNMS is not financially as effective as it was supposed to be. But we thank God that some Mission work go on.

New Thinking

From 2001, CNMS began to rethink the strategy for effective Mission work. First of all, we began to think of reversing the system of recruiting, training, and sending MPs to Dioceses. We felt we needed to find out what Dioceses needed or wanted before recruiting any one to train and send. In the course of this exercise, we discovered that a good number of Dioceses preferred the CNMS to come and train their own 'Missionaries' who they would deploy locally to meet their local needs for Mission and Evangelism. CNMS obliged and this arrangement became an instant winner. We named such trained personnel, Associate Mission Partners – AMPs.

A good number of Dioceses have since received this Training Service which turned out to be less expensive to the CNMS and very beneficial to the Dioceses concerned. The good thing about this was that the training was geared towards the area concerned, since Dioceses are diverse in make-up and situations. That meant that Dioceses adapted the training to suit their situation and environment. This offer is still open to any Diocese that requires it. We have not trained any personnel for over a year now but we shall resume as soon as requests come in.

In 2003, the Church of Nigeria embarked on a general Mission-oriented expansion plan where every single Anglican was expected to win another soul

for Christ within three years - operation **1-1-3**. For some Dioceses to adequately undertake this programme they asked for training for many of their members. The CNMS offered the training on Mission and Evangelism to any Diocese that asked for it. That was after carrying out Provincial training to many of the then 10 Ecclesiastical Provinces. In many cases, the training for Dioceses was an off-shoot of the Provincial Training. We want to believe that the Church has grown over these years through this programme. And we are more satisfied that the CNMS was pursuing an angle of work that was finally making sense to the Bishops and their Dioceses.

At the moment, the CNMS has stopped any new recruitment of Mission Partners for training and deployment within the Country. The only positive effect is that we are able to financially maintain the very few Mission Partners currently in the field. We can just cope now and we intend to keep this arrangement the way it is, until we embark on a change after deliberations with the House of Bishops.

FOREIGN MISSIONS

We began getting requests from some parts of African for some form of Missionary assistance through personnel or otherwise. There is a Mission outpost in Lome. And since the Anglican Church planted there has grown, the CNMS has now handed that Church over completely to the Province of West Africa, even though the CNMS has arranged with the Diocese of Mbaise in the Church of Nigeria to adopt that church as a Mission station. That way, the Diocese supplied and is currently maintaining the Priest there as a missionary contribution to the growing Church in Togo. The Bishop of the Diocese of Ho in the Church of Ghana, under the Province of West Africa, was mandated to provide Episcopal oversight to the church.

Another Anglican Church has been planted in Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire and this time the arrangement for 'adoption' is with the Diocese of Warri, in the Church of Nigeria. The Clergyman there from Warri Diocese is doing a good job with the new Church. They have since planted another Church and are planning for more plants in the near future. The Anglican Church in Corte d'Ivoire will soon be registered officially; and after that, the CNMS shall hand it over to the Province of West Africa for the provision of Episcopal oversight. We have a Clergyman – our brother Rev Kingsley Ogbonda and his wife - on a very interesting Mission assignment in Madagascar. By arrangement through the CNMS, this Mission Partner couple and their funding come from the Diocese of Delta North. Also together with the Church of Nigeria, a Missionary Bishop was sent to the Church of Congo to prepare the Kasai area for the purpose of becoming a Diocese. He has since returned after one tour of three years when the Diocese was created.

There are outposts with the knowledge of CNMS by some Dioceses that share common borders with the countries of Chad and Equatorial Guinea. We are watching the development of those churches with interest.

Reports from these two locations indicate that the work out there is tough, very tasking, but rewarding. We are discovering, not surprisingly, that additional funds are needed to satisfy some urgent local needs amongst the people in these mission areas. According to the Book of James' injunction – ***we cannot ask a brother to keep warm, when we have not provided the blanket.***

CURRENT POSITION

The CNMS will continue to work internally within the country or in some neighbouring countries as the opportunities present themselves. Through the Diocesan training programme, the CNMS will act locally as a catalyst, enabling the Dioceses get on meaningfully with Mission. The CNMS will retain its few Mission Partners on the field, serving in the stations in the Dioceses where they have been and are still needed. We may recruit further, but this has to be strictly on request from Dioceses.

Looking Ahead

The CNMS is still willing to assist Dioceses:

- a. In training Mission Partners (MPs) or Associate Mission Partners (AMPs), to assist within the new Missionary Dioceses.***
- b. In channelling people from different Dioceses who wish to go on foreign Missions, as long as the Dioceses meet with the conditions.***
- c. In training people in various Dioceses for Church growth operations.***
- d. In recruiting, training and sending MPs of different categories to Dioceses, if they indicate the need for it. This will be subject to adequate funding.***

We are still a growing Church with new ideas of Mission still coming up. The CNMS hopes to be able to continue to adjust and readjust in order to be of relevance to the Church and to constantly keep Mission on the fore front of the agenda for the Dioceses. We are convinced that a Church that does not engage in Mission will obviously implode with disastrous consequences.

Rt. Rev Ken S. E. Okeke
Chairman, Church of Nigeria Missionary Society (CNMS)