

Training: It's part of our DNA in Africa

BY MIKE MCCLAFLIN

“Trained leaders are Africa's hope, and we are committed to assisting their development in every way possible.”

Training is a critical part of the process of building a lasting foundation for the church. We have found this to be true in Africa, where training seems to be such a vital part of our DNA — a key to the church's development and function.

When we consider the history of the Assemblies of God in Africa — particularly those national churches that today have a firm foundation — we think of the countries of Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya.

In each of these four countries, our U.S. AG missionaries have served for many years. A determined focus on leadership training is a key factor in the national church's success. Church leaders in each nation insist training is a prerequisite for a minister to receive credentials, and receiving credentials is required in order to pastor a church. In addition, Bible school students must have either pastoral or church planting experience at the time

of graduation or else they will lose their credentials.

In Kenya, where the church strongly emphasizes residential training and extension programs, workers are currently planting eight to 10 churches every week. Yet many countries in Africa do not have an adequate foundation of training currently in place.

On a recent trip to Angola, I met with Fernando Manuel Panzo, general superintendent of the Angola Assemblies of God, and his executive team. The first question I asked Brother Panzo was, “What is your crying need?”

“Training!” he responded.

I hear that cry for help repeatedly as I travel across the continent and talk with church leaders.

The Angola Assemblies of God consists of 3,500 churches and 1.5 million believers, but it has only 600 trained pastors.

“We have very little leadership training material in Portuguese,” Brother Panzo said to me.

Two training needs we are

desperately trying to address in Africa are (1) to provide curriculum translated into specific vernaculars and (2) to expand the extension education process so attending a resident Bible school is not the only method of training.

Many pastors lead congregations located in such remote areas that to attend a resident Bible school is completely out of the question. We must change the way we think about extension education as it relates to resident education. It's not a competition. Instead, we want to find ways to get information and biblical training to all pastors wherever they are located.

Training is especially essential in providing our ministers with a solid doctrinal foundation as it relates to the Pentecostal framework.

We are grateful that almost every area of the African

continent is experiencing tremendous revival. In 1990, the Assemblies of God in Africa numbered 2 million believers. Today that number exceeds 13 million.

Half of the people attending our churches in Africa today have been believers for less than seven years. As a result, relatively new believers with no ministerial training are leading many congregations. They are placed in leadership simply because they have been a Christian longer than any other member of the congregation. A church led by an untrained pastor is much more vulnerable to doctrinal error.

Africa's Hope was created to assist the African church in meeting the need for trained leaders by expanding existing Bible schools, developing curriculum on all levels of education and promoting innovative approaches to training. Trained leaders are Africa's hope,

and we are committed to assisting their development in every way possible.

As part of its training efforts, Africa's Hope will host the second Africa Leadership Summit for the U.S. Fellowship on May 7-8 in Sacramento, Calif. Key African church leaders will meet with U.S. pastors and laypeople and share inspiring reports of what God is doing across the continent. They will also address the critical needs that exist regarding training.

We hope the American church will join in our efforts to inculcate into Assemblies of God fellowships across Africa the DNA of training that will make them church planting, Bible-teaching, evangelistically potent national churches. **tpe**

MIKE MCCLAFLIN is Africa regional director for Assemblies of God World Missions.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

