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In the Nigerian Context

The Very Rev. Dr. Chinonyerem Ekebuisi

Introduction

Connexionism is identified and defined in terms of belonging, mutuality, and interdependence. All Christians are essentially linked to one another; within the Methodist Church Nigerian experience, no local church is or can be an autonomous unit complete in itself, and this is expressed in apt structures of oversight, balancing authority and subsidiarity. Through lived experiences and circumstances, the Methodist

Church Nigeria has adopted and demonstrated the connexional principle within its unique structure. These principles of connexionalism have remained fundamental to its self-identity, to its experience, and to its understanding of the church. This sense of belonging, although expressed and experienced in many different ways, is demonstrated in the evolving history of the Church.

Since the twentieth century, the connexional understanding of the church in Nigeria has faced challenges, such as the cost, ease, and risk of traveling within a large country like Nigeria; it is difficult to sustain a church that is built on a closely integrated committee system in a big developing country already divided along ethnic and political lines. Since its autonomy in 1962, the Conference has wrestled with social and political questions in relation to issues of human identity and belonging, seeking to work out how to live together as members of diverse communities with sometimes competing needs, values, and priorities. These questions have led the Conference to adopt a unique structural expression of connexionalism, which this chapter will attempt to document and demonstrate.

Early Beginning of Methodist Church Nigeria

Methodism began in Nigeria through the activities of two brands of British Methodist Missionary Societies. The first Society to arrive was the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society on September 24, 1842. The Primitive Methodist Missionary Society later arrived in 1893 through Equatorial Guinea. Following the 1932 amalgamation and unification of these two Missions in Britain, their activities and achievements in Nigeria were joined to form what later became known as Methodist Church Nigeria. Mercy Oduyoye explains, “When the churches of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in Nigeria came together, they did so by instruction from above. . . . From London, Methodist East and

West of the Niger, built up by two different British Methodist traditions, were thrown together to become Methodist Church Nigeria.”²²

Chief Kanu Offony and Rev. Ike Godwin also record,

Until 1962, there were two Methodist districts in Nigeria. The first was the Western Nigeria District, which was established by missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The second was the Eastern Nigeria District, which was founded by the Primitive Methodist missionary society. No direct link whatsoever existed between the two Nigeria Districts except that they were both administered by the British Methodist Society operating from 25 Marylebone Road London. The situation was in no way changed by the 1932 unification of the various factions of Methodist Church in Britain.²³

Autonomous Status

Methodist Church Nigeria became an autonomous Conference on September 28, 1962. Rev. Leslie Davison, BD, then president of the British Conference, inaugurated the Nigeria Conference after the signing of the Deed of Foundation and declared the Conference duly constituted. Autonomy did not change the structure of church governance. The Societies and Circuits remained, grouped under seven district synods. The Western District with headquarters in Lagos was divided into three Synods: Lagos, Ibadan, and Ilesha. The Eastern District, with headquarters in Umuahia, was divided into three: Calabar, Umuahia, and Port Harcourt. The work in northern Nigeria, formerly under Lagos, was classed as a district with headquarters in Jos. Over and above these was the Conference. The minister and the catechists were in charge of the Societies. Superintendents, who presided over the

22 M. A. Oduyoye, *The Wesleyan Presence in Nigeria: An Exploration of Power, Control and Partnership in Mission* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Sefer, 1992), 130.

23 Kanu Offony and Ike Godwin Chukwuezuo, *Most Rev. Dr. Rogers Uwadi: The Compelling Story of a Colossus in The Methodist Church Nigeria* (Owerri, Nigeria: New African Publishers, 1999), 55.

quarterly meeting, headed the Circuits, and the districts were under the chairmen who presided over the synods. The Conference area, comprising all the Methodist churches in the whole country, was presided over by the president.

In giving the Methodist Church Nigeria its autonomy, the Deed of Church Order was patterned after the constitution of the British Conference, and the president had to change every five years or be reelected, but at each annual meeting, the Conference, by ballot, had to designate a qualified person to be president designate with the intent that he would become the president if his designation was confirmed at the next annual meeting.

Just five years after the autonomy, Nigeria experienced a destabilizing civil war that lasted for three years, from 1967 to 1970. Coincidentally, the war followed the already-existing fault lines in the church, north and west on one side of the war while the east remained on the other side. The hostilities, suspicions, and bitterness in the nation spilled over to the Church and greatly affected the young Conference. First, there was the problem of lack of communication between the Conference Office in Lagos and the war-torn areas in the East, leading to a total collapse of administration. The General Purpose Committee (GPC) that met in 1967 during the early years of the civil war received a memorandum from the Eastern sector requesting the creation of Area Conferences. That same memorandum was supported by the Western sector that met before the 1972 GPC with these words:

That this meeting has carefully considered the memorandum from the “Eastern Sector” of the Methodist Church Nigeria, as well as the memoranda which came into being as a result of it. That the meeting has given due recognition to the current problem of the East with regards to inter states and ethnic relations (a problem which is as a result especially of the last civil war in Nigeria) and considered how this might affect an “Eastern Sector” Area Conference if created. That, nevertheless, for the good of Methodist Church Nigeria for the effective prosecution and promotion of God’s work by the church, the creation of Area Conference is the only effective answer to our current predicament. The meeting

therefore recommends to G.P.C. that the principle of the creation of Area Conferences be accepted; and that the mechanics of this be worked out by a committee to be set up immediately, with a view to placing a definite resolution before the 1972 conference.²⁴

The GPC, however, reaffirmed its unshaken belief in one Methodist Church for Nigeria. The committee considered, however, that in view of the nature of the country, its size, the channels of communications, the cost of travel, recent political events, and the tensions that now exist and may continue to exist, there is an urgent need for a review of the constitution of the Church, which was designed on the basis of a closely integrated committee system but which had now proved unmanageable. This discussion was on the front burner when the same 1972 Conference elected Professor Emmanuel Bolaji Idowu as the president of Conference on October 14, 1972.

Professor E. Bolaji Idowu Reforms

The Rev. Professor Bolaji Idowu was a leading advocate of theology that bears the stamp of original thinking and meditation of Africans, before his election as president of the Conference. Among modern African theologians, Idowu is seen as a great apostle of Indigenization, having devoted two books to the subject. In 1965, he published *Towards an Indigenous Church* through Oxford University Press.²⁵ This book was his first scholarly contribution to the delicate and urgent task of building a living church in Africa. At the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963, he presented a paper, which he later published in *The Selfhood of the Church in Africa*.²⁶ In these two works, he advocated for a religious consciousness that was inherently African. Also, during the

24 M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria, 1842–1992* (Ibadan, Nigeria: NPS Education Publishers, 1992), 143.

25 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

26 E. Bolaji Idowu, *The Selfhood of the Church in Africa* (Lagos: Methodist Church Nigeria Press, 1970s).

seventh International African Seminar, organized by the International African Institute in Accra, Ghana, in April 1965, he presented a paper, “The Predicament of the Church in Africa.”²⁷

Idowu, in his argument, stressed the necessity to replace foreign ideologies when he contended that they cause spiritual sterility in the lives of African churches. He pursued this idea further while he was writing the introduction to the book *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*.²⁸ These ideas formed the bulk of his thesis in that work. Idowu came to the seat of the president of Nigerian Methodist Conference already aware of what he wanted to do. The necessity and urgent need to replace the European complexion of the Church loomed so large in his heart that immediately after his election he said,

We must undertake the review of our constitution in a way that would reflect and emphasize that ours is an autonomous church in Nigeria. There is a task of ordering the life of the Church in such a way that she will minister effectively and adequately to the needs of our people in their native context, here we are faced with the delicate but urgent undertaking of the indigenization of the Church, which embraces a thorough review of our liturgy. Reconciliation throughout Nigeria is a necessity laid upon us. This will take our spiritual and moral energy—but it is the work into which we have been called and we must fulfill our assignment.²⁹

In his first address to the 1973 Conference, he recognized that the Church that came into being in 1962 was made up of two separate bodies, which until then had had little relational contact with each other, each of them having come into being because of two separate missionary activities, determined by two different modes of evangelism

27 E. Bolaji Idowu, “The Predicament of the Church in Africa,” in *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, ed. Christian Goncalves K. Baeta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 417–40.

28 E. Bolaji Idowu, “Introduction,” in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969).

29 Methodist Church, Nigeria Conference, *Minutes* (Methodist Church, Nigeria Conference, 1972), 11–12.

organized according to two varied ecclesiastic patterns. Each of the two bodies also happened to embrace several ethnic groups each with its own particular orientation, traditional or political. According to Idowu, the tragedy of the power struggles in the past eleven years of the Church's life had caused the Church to waste her spiritual energy so much that she had been rendered insensible to the years that the locust has eaten, hence the title he gave to his 1973 address to Conference, "The Years That the Locust Has Eaten." He posited that Methodist Church Nigeria must be really and truly a living Church, a Church that has a recognizable identity, a Church with an image worthy of her status, a Church effective in her witness and ministry, a Church with life and work that demonstrate an unmistakable Spirit power.³⁰ To him, a Church that is to be effective in service must be equipped with the Spirit and must manifest that fact outwardly in her expressional activities.

On the image of the Church, he discussed several issues. Regarding the Constitution, he raised the question of what kind of Constitution the Church needed as an autonomous Church, if it is to be truly autocephalous. Further, it had become clear to him that there was an urgent call for the overhauling and the reorganization of the structure of the Church and of the ordering of her ministry. Regarding the liturgy, he averred, "We are in Nigeria and must be faithful in ministering to the spiritual needs of Nigeria worshipers through radical changes in our liturgy and with this we can stop the drift of our people to other places of worship where they are going in their hundreds because they feel that there, their spiritual needs are better answered."³¹

Regarding the staffing of the Church, he said that there was little doubt that the spiritual life of the Church was at a rather low ebb, and the people who were either staying away or deserting the Church were doing so simply as a consequence of the fact that, as hungry and thirsty

30 E. Bolaji Idowu, "Restoring the Years That the Locust Has Eaten" (presidential address, Representative Session of Methodist Church Nigeria twelfth annual conference, November 20, 1973) (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oluseyi Press, 1973), 5.

31 Idowu, "Restoring the Years That the Locust Has Eaten," 6.

sheep, they were looking up to the Church in vain for nourishment. He asserted a major reason for this—acute shortage of trained, dedicated staff in the Church. The number of ministers was detrimentally too few, and those few were overworked—so overworked that they had little time for study and meditation.

In that address, he pointed to the need for the Church to reorganize in a way that will give dignity of form and content to its life, the need to consider carefully and adopt every measure that will make the Church effectual, as well as respectable within the cultural setting in which it is situated. He proposed the setting up and building of the District headquarters. He found as abnormal the practice whereby a chairman stayed wherever he was when elected as a chairman and at the same time functioned as the superintendent of a Circuit or Circuits and minister in charge of a congregation in addition to being the pastoral and administrative head of a District.³²

As a follow-up to his Conference address, he organized a retreat at Asaba from February 1st to 3rd, 1974. During the retreat, those meeting considered matters relating to liturgy, the structure of the Church, and the ordering of the ministry. His address to Conference formed the basis of the retreat's deliberation. On the structure of the Church, which was made up of the Society, Circuit, District, and Conference, he suggested the Local Church in place of the Society, Circuit still remained the Circuit, Diocese in place of the District, a new structure named Archdiocese, and finally the Conference.

At the retreat, he further called on participants to consider whether Methodist Church Nigeria as presently set up was as effectual as she should be and in what way the organizational pattern might affect its effectiveness. The question has come up again and again as to why we should not change the titles of the hierarchy of our Church. The next was the superintendence, the chairmanship, and the presidency, which he saw as ephemeral offices. The office bearer could be sacked from that position at the whims and caprices of a collection of “influential” persons, who could sway or dominate the meeting, which constitutionally held the fate of the office in its hands. He posed the question

32 Idowu, “Restoring the Years That the Locust Has Eaten,” 8.

whether this ordering gives grace and dignity (ecclesiastical and spiritual) to the ministry in our Nigerian cultural setting. He suggested that in the context of Africa, the congregation sees the minister as a priest. This is consonant with the African background. He argued that once an African ceases to see his minister as a priest, the minister's position has been emptied of any dignity or virtue. Perhaps this is one of the contributing factors that have resulted in the way that Methodist ministers are regarded or treated as messengers or houseboys in certain quarters. Has it not been said again and again—and quite loudly too—that "the minister is our servant; we employ him and can 'sack' him at any time"?³³ Finally, he suggested the adoption of the designations of deacon, priest, presbyter, bishop, archbishop, and patriarch. The bishops, the archbishops, and the patriarch will hold their office until they retire. Comparing the old and the suggested new order he said,

The advantage of a nonpermanent, ephemeral office is that the holder of the post tends to be careful in his doings and dealings, especially if he is a person eaten up by love of office for its own sake: power is not left in the hands of one person for too long [because] "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" . . . Besides, a situation is created in which dirty ecclesiastical politics will thrive, a situation also in which it is easy for every other minister—especially the unscrupulously ambitious—to see himself annually as competitor for the office with the result that no end of mudslinging, uncooperative attitude, waste of spiritual and emotional energy on the part of certain colleagues, as well as of the person in office, go on behind the scenes. For me, the real disadvantage is that a person who really has something to offer, by God's grace, the edification and expansion of the Church may find it frustratingly impossible to plan ahead, since his tenure of office is uncertain or, worse still, at the mercy of his followers. Such a person, if he is wise, will only go on in faith and prayers

33 Idowu, "Restoring the Years That the Locust Has Eaten," 8.

do the best that he could for the moment, while refraining from placing his trust in man.³⁴

Idowu said that Methodism in Nigeria had unwittingly taken something of the marked element of the Eastern Orthodox Church without consciously working out its implications. The position of the president of the Methodist Church by definition is higher than that of an archbishop. The archbishop is limited in his jurisdiction, whereas the presidency of the Methodist Church covers the whole of the Conference area. It is even higher than that of the presiding bishop of American Methodism. Since the president is the head of the whole Church and not an ad hoc chairman of Joint Conference, this rank is that of the traditional patriarch or pontiff. Finally, Idowu called on Methodist Church Nigeria to face the consciousness of the inadequacy within or the pressure of external circumstances to make up its mind and establish its choice with regard to the ordering of the ministry. He finally presented his suggestions: “The pattern, which is emerging by evolution, is that of Patriarch, Archbishops, Diocesan Bishops, Presbyters, Ministers or Priests and Deacons. It seems to me that nothing less than this will meet our situation in a country of this size, in a competitive age.” At the end of the three-day retreat, participants came up with resolutions and recommendations, which they recommended to the 1974 Methodist Church Nigeria Conference.

Resolution 1

That the Conference Committees on the Life, Work, Faith and Order of Methodist Church Nigeria, here assembled in retreat at the Rural Training Centre Asaba, having given prayerful consideration, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

- 1) Recognized the need to reappraise the organization of the Methodist Church Nigeria for the purpose of promoting the work of God in the Methodist Church Nigeria.
- 2) Realized that the present set-up has tended to reflect a lower status on the ministry of the Methodist Church Nigeria,

34 Idowu, “Restoring the Years That the Locust Has Eaten,” 15.

not only on the part of the public at large, but also, has constantly tended to embarrass, and has often made our members accept the inferior status attributed to our ministry.

3) Recognized that the desire to give a new, true image reflecting the true status of the Methodist Church is widespread through the conference area.

4) Recognized that the Methodist Church Nigeria, after twelve years of autonomy and autocephaly and over one hundred and thirty years of existence, the time is overdue for reappraisal.

5) Realized that the present nomenclatures of President, Chairman, Superintendent used in describing our ministry do not reflect their true place and function in the Christian Church.

Do resolve and they hereby resolve to recommend to the Conference of the Methodist Church, Nigeria that the time has come for a change suitable to the ecclesiastical stature and reflecting the nationwide image of our Church, and our place in the tradition of the Christian Church, within the guidelines of the Holy Scriptures, and under the continuous tuition of the Holy Spirit.

Resolution 2

That Episcopacy in its scriptural and ecclesiastical connotation be adopted by the Methodist Church Nigeria.

Resolution 3

That the following titles, which are in scriptural and ecclesiastical traditions, be adopted: Deacon, Priest, Presbyter, Bishop, Archbishop and Patriarch.³⁵

The *Asaba Retreat Document*, containing the above resolutions, was widely circulated free of charge among members of the Church with the request that in keeping with the Methodist practice, it should be discussed at all levels—Societies, Circuits, and District Synods—and that views and suggestions emanating from this discussion be passed through the usual channel back to Conference. The reports from the

35 *Asaba Retreat Document* (1974) circulated to members after the retreat.

Societies, Circuits, and District Synods revealed the fears of the members. Idowu wrote another document to further explain the proposal and allay the fears of the members. In his words:

I hear that there is need for further explanation on the proposal for the Ordering of the ministry. I had thought that the published Asaba paper was sufficiently self-explanatory. The explanation, as I believe, is to allay the fears of our people about the misconception of Episcopacy, which translated into practice, has been bedeviling the Church not only in Nigeria but almost throughout Africa. I share our people's concern with considerable sympathy.³⁶

He directed the chairmen of Districts, superintendents of Circuits, and all ministers to inform all the people that the Constitution, which was now under preparation, included these ideas:

The authority of Methodist Church Nigeria is vested in Conference and not in the hands of any single person, and not in the Ordained Ministry. Methodist Church Nigeria believes and maintains firmly that the Church is made up of the whole people of God, ordained and lay. The hierarchy of Patriarch, Archbishops, Bishops, Presbyters, Priests and Deacons, is administrative and functional and shall operate as agreed and decided by Conference and prescribed in the new Constitution. Its purpose is for effective administration and effectual image of the Church in a country and continent, where the designations currently used by us do not convey sufficient meaning and have been partly the reason for the disregard with which our Church is being treated.

There is no title that we are adopting now that is not biblical or historically ecclesiastical. We are, in fact, taking a departure in the right direction, from the biblical or historically ecclesiastical titles. We are, therefore, bringing ourselves back into time with biblical and historically ecclesiastical ordering of the ministry. A high-powered committee will be set up to address itself to the

36 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Methodist Church Nigeria: Church Structure and Ordering of the Ministry* (Lagos: Graphic Press, 1974).

task of nominating under Conference Order the new ordained officials according to the proposed reordering.³⁷

The Fourteenth Annual Conference, held at the University of Calabar from September 2nd to 12th, 1975, adopted the new Constitution. The sitting Conference, by a unanimous vote, declared January 20, 1976, as “The Appointed Day.” The president was elected the patriarch. The Conference areas were divided into four Archdioceses, and the archbishops were named. So were the Dioceses created and the Bishops nominated. The corresponding lay presidents, including two women, also were nominated. The Conference then adjourned to reconvene from January 16th to 26th, 1976. The Appointed Day was held at Methodist Church of the Trinity, Tinubu, Lagos. The president (patriarch-elect), read the deed of the New Constitution Reform Order, and the twenty trustees (ten ministers and ten laypeople) appointed by the Conference signed it. The Bishop Prince Taylor, chairman of the World Methodist Council, preached the historic sermon. The patriarch and all other nominated archbishops and bishops were subsequently invested.

The adoption of this 1975/1976 Constitution created a crisis that divided the Church into two factions. Some members opted to remain with the 1962 inherited Constitution while others accepted the new Constitution. After eleven years of the division, in January 1987, the laity of the two factions in Lagos Diocese passed a resolution of fusion and inaugurated a fusion committee. The work of this committee brought about the Sagamu Assembly of all Methodists from all over the country in July 1989. The Assembly, presided over jointly by the patriarch and the president, appointed a Constitution Review Committee to produce a new Constitution. The Draft Constitution was submitted to the resumed Assembly in October 1989, which was then sent to all Dioceses of Methodist Church Nigeria for study and comments. The Assembly decided to hold joint Conference in Sagamu on March 1–2, 1990, to consider the comments. The joint Conference met as agreed and, after making all necessary amendments based on the comments on the draft Constitution, which included the change of the title from

37 Idowu, *Methodist Church Nigeria*, 2.

patriarch to prelate, the establishment of the Men's Fellowship, and the creation of the lay session of Conference that would be meeting simultaneously with the ministerial session, adopted the new Constitution.

On the decision of this joint Conference, a service of reunification was held on Sunday, March 4, 1990, and on May 23 and 24, 1990, the joint Conference ratified the new Constitution after the agreed-upon amendments had been corrected. The service for signing the 1990 Constitution was held on Wesley Day, May 24, 1990.

The Present Status of the Church

On July 4, 2003, the General Purpose Committee of Methodist Church Nigeria, in full realization of the urgent need to further reposition the Church to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century, set up a committee called the Strategic Planning Team (SPT). The team was to examine where the Church was, where it is now, where it hopes to be, and how to get there. After several months of research, studies, interactive sessions, and retreats, the SPT came up with a report that identified some problems and weaknesses and then proffered solutions. The recommendations of the team were critically and exhaustively considered and then adopted after necessary amendments by the Thirty-Ninth/Fourth Biennial Conference, which was held at Kaduna in August 2004. The Conference therefore came up with setting the vision of the church—"To be the largest and most spiritually vibrant church in Nigeria"—and the mission—"To consistently win more souls for Christ, develop spiritually fulfilled members and remain very active in serving humanity." They also observed that the weak headquarters of Methodist Church Nigeria had not helped the Church to achieve the right level of cohesion and positioning for vibrant growth. The Conference therefore accepted to reorganize the structure of the Church in order to strengthen the connexional system and make it more unified. Three directorates that would report directly to the prelate therefore were created. They are:

1. *Directorate of finance and administration:* This is headed by a bishop, who is also the secretary of Conference, and he oversees the general administration of the headquarters, interchurch relations, staff matters, management of Conference funds, and organizing the biannual conference.
2. *Directorate of evangelism and discipleship:* This is headed by a bishop and shall be responsible for liturgy and spiritual development, coordination of ministerial training, and coordination of preaching plans and other literatures of the church. He also will supervise the various organs of the church.
3. *The directorate of planning, research, and services:* The directorate coordinates the expansion programs of the Church, logistics and investment monitoring, health care and welfare institutions, and educational and investment institutions.
4. *Conference Connexional Council:* This is made up of the prelate, the Conference lay president, archbishops, archdiocesan lay presidents, and the Conference secretary; the bishop of evangelism replaced the GPC. This Committee is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the church.³⁸

At the end, Conference directed that a new Constitution should be put in place to reflect the new vision of the Church. The committee for reviewing the existing Constitution was given terms of reference, which included reexamining all the suggestions made so as to build on the current trust of the Church. The Fortieth/Fifth Biennial Conference at its Representative Session held at IBOM Hall, IBB Way, Uyo on August 2–10, 2006, ratified and adopted the new 2006 Constitution.

The 2006 Constitution ensured that the practical expressions of connexionalism in belonging, mutuality, and interdependence were maintained. The missionary dynamics, enabling the effective deployment of resources in the service of God's mission with the Conference area, were upheld. A committee of the whole Conference is saddled with the responsibilities of stationing Conference agents. Even with the

38 Methodist Church Nigeria Constitution 2006, ch. 4 ¶183–84, ¶177–78, ¶160.

adoption of Episcopacy, the ordination, preferment, ministerial discipline, and election of bishops are still the sole duties of Conference. Uniquely within Methodist Church Nigeria, bishops and archbishops are translated from one see to another, unlike in other traditions; a Methodist bishop is not excluded from the itinerant ministry. Methodist Church Nigeria as a national Church still maintains the itinerant ministry—wherever they are most needed—an acknowledgment that the ministry as a whole is at the disposal of the entire Connexion.

Relationship is at the heart of connexionalism. Being connected involves hard work: sometimes expectations of support are not met; sometimes churches fail to look beyond themselves to see how they might support and encourage others. Being in relationship is profoundly challenging. The challenge is compounded because contemporary society tends toward a dominant culture in which personal choice and the rights of the individual are emphasized over commitment to others. The twenty-first-century crisis of urbanization is putting a great deal of stress on the principles of connexionalism. We now have rich Dioceses, Circuits, and Local Churches. Many ministers are no longer willing to leave the urban, wealthy, and influential stations to serve in less influential stations. Again, in terms of funding, some of the very rich Local Churches are not disposed to using their resources to help the Connexion. Relationships are sustained and a sense of belonging strengthened through time, attention, and commitment. The idea of connexionalism being a system in which the strong help the weak and in which wider resources and experience can be made available to smaller congregations is quickly dying off. Connexionalism therefore has pastoral, evangelistic, and apologetic resonance in a world craving genuine and meaningful relationships, and it offers a hopeful alternative to a society that can seem individualistic and consumer focused.

The overall governing authority of Methodist Church Nigeria is still vested at Conference in session. The Council of Bishops does not have powers to legislate on behalf of the Church; their recommendations still come to Conference for ratification. The Archdiocesan Councils, Diocesan Synods, Circuit Councils, and Local Church Councils all represent the Conference and derive their powers from Conference.

Conclusion

Connexionism in its eighteenth-century usage referred both to the circle of those connected to some person or group and to the relationship itself. This description of the Wesleys' movement, retaining its distinctive eighteenth-century spelling, has endured for nearly three hundred years. Connexionism has been elaborated theologically, expressed in hymns and liturgies, justified in debates, and articulated in the constitutions and polity of the Methodist people in Nigeria as we have seen. Implicitly and explicitly, it has also shaped, and been lived out in, the faith, practice, and assumptions of generations of Methodist people in Nigeria. It is a way of being Christian, which Methodist Church Nigeria shares with other Conferences across the globe. Connexionism challenges us to a broader understanding of belonging, inviting us to see our experience of being a church as reaching beyond those whom we meet week by week, to other Methodists elsewhere, offering the opportunity of increased connection with other people and the world.

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In the United Methodist Church

Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr.

Introduction

I begin by noting the complexity of this assignment. Some of those reading this will have an intense interest in the changes occurring and anticipated in The United Methodist Church, and many of those will have defined positions related to these changes. Many others will have less knowledge or interest, simply because it is outside their own context and sphere of professional responsibility. I will try not to make assumptions in this chapter, instead attempting simply to describe where we are.

This is my third Oxford Institute. I participated as a pastor in 2007 and as a newly elected bishop in 2013. One of my consecration vows was to seek unity of the church. Very soon after the beginning of my service I was asked to serve as one of three moderators of our global process related to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning or queer) identity and the unity of the church. And soon after that I was asked by my episcopal colleagues to serve a term (2018–2020) as president of our council of bishops. I have found myself