

My name is Rev. Bernard Timothy Appau from Ghana. I am one of the Asian Rural Institute graduates of 2001 batch. I am a Baptist minister and serving as a Missionary chaplain in ARI through the UCCJ (United Church of Christ in Japan). I am also assisting Poultry section and Community Life.

Before coming to the Asian Rural Institute, I served at one of the rural churches with the Ghana Baptist Convention for 10 years.

I was a business person selling Agro-chemical to farmers so when I came to know the effect of the chemicals, I stopped the business and go back to the village to do farming without chemical in order to be able to talk with farmers, after some years I went to Seminary. But still I was searching for a proper way of doing organic farming so that I can encourage the Baptist rural churches to adopt organic farming and do away with chemicals. When my General Secretary heard about ARI, he decided to send me to come and study.

Rural churches in Africa

The population of African churches is growing every day and mainly the youth population, aged 15-24 years, is the highest. By 2030, it is predicted that the number of youths in Africa will increased by 42%.

Africa is one of the most dynamic centers of Christianity in the world. Africa has a significant share of the world's 2.2 billion Christians: about 30 percent of the world's Evangelicals, 20 percent of the world's Pentecostals and Charismatics, and about 15 percent of the world's Roman Catholics.

According to my experience working in the rural area, a major part of pastoral ministry is visiting church members and attending social gatherings (such as burials and funerals, weddings and naming ceremonies), and of course, preaching).

Challenges

The rural churches of my continent are facing a lot of challenges such as problems of water, electricity, health care, food, education, and employment.

Apart from these, unceasing tribal and ethnic conflicts, political conflicts, and hopelessness overwhelm many of our sisters and brothers every single day which affects the churches as well.

Many churches do not have permanent place of worship, they use classrooms for Sundays and evening services.

Other challenges in the rural areas are lack of jobs, although agriculture can create jobs, but the young people are not interested in that field at all. Therefore, the level of rural poverty is very high, and it is always affecting the financial growth of the church.

Churches are the one responsible for a pastor's salary. Imagine how his children can go to school, hospital if they are sick, and many more, then you can imagine depression some rural pastors are going through if the salary is not paid. It depends on the financial capacity of the Church.

I remember one day when I came back home, one of my daughters had an inscription on the wall at my sitting room and it says, "I will never marry a Baptist rural pastor and I will not allow my daughter to in the future because of what we are going through."

I was shocked and all I can do is to call her and encourage her that we need to have hope in the Lord and understand that He is not punishing us, He is watching us, and then we prayed.

Due to poverty, many people have resorted to false miracles and prophecies, and the prosperity gospel. So many are moving from the main line church to the so-called independent church not through door-to-door evangelist approach but like what is called "Cassava tree evangelism".

What I mean by that is they don't go out to reach new souls but rather bring the old souls from mainline churches to theirs, so the church is not growing with new souls but rather multiplication of old souls.

When you want to multiply cassava plantation you just cut the trees in pieces and stick them in the soil. Then no new seeds need to be planted.

Opportunities

There are some opportunities in serving rural churches but few. In my opinion as a rural pastor, you have the opportunity of being part of the community, learn from their culture and traditions. There is land for farming if you are interested and you can also have people to help you.

The good happening in rural churches are that the members can easily become like one family. It is also easy to organize community work to help each other's farming activities. You can visit your members at any time.

Actions

Going back to Ghana, I will build a place for what I call child development center where I will bring children who are orphans and support their education. I will connect farming with the center whereby we will grow what we will eat. I do not have the funds yet, but I will start with what I have. .Apart from that I will continue what I was doing before which is to encourage rural pastors to get into farming.

I would like to end here. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.