

The chairman added, this message that God gave was intended to make mankind trust in God at all times. He told me that if mankind became so convinced that God is able to do exceedingly and abundantly above everything that man can ask from him, it will be well with them. This will enable men to cast all their burdens unto God and enhance them to wait for God patiently to solve all their problems and petitions for them.

He told me again that, his message was to bring peace and harmony in the heart of all mankind. This is because; to him man wants to be assured that there is a way out, no matter what happened to him. He said that god can make a way where there seems to be no way.

Although his message was only in words, God brought about the manifestation, he stated. He emphasised that there was a tangible manifestation of the power of God to solve all problems in the church.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TEACHING AND PRACTICES

1. DOCTRINES OR TEACHINGS

a) God

The church teaches the fact that God is made up of three persons in one being. In other words they have a strong belief in the "Trinity". The Father Son and the Holy Spirit are personalities of God. The church added that the personalities of Gad have equal power, none is superior to other and they are not divided. I asked the General Apostle to explain about this teaching and he finally told me

when they fast, they do not eat nor drink water. They also pray a lot anytime they are fasting that is why they call it fasting and prayers. The church believes that as one fasts and prays one will become more spiritual. The chairman including some of the pastors that I interviewed also confirmed these.

e) PROPHECY

The church believes in prophetic messages in their church services, usually given by pastors and any member of the church who has the gift of prophecy. The church believes in prophetic messages, which is commonly gifted to the believers.

Some usually speak in tongues while others have the gift of interpretation

Their biblical support is referred from first Corinthians chapter 14 on "gifts of prophecy and tongues". The chairman, Clement Brakatu is also said to have the prophetic gift and therefore he gives messages to people during their deliverance services.

f) DIVINE HEALING:

Healing forms one of the basic beliefs of the church. They have healing services on Wednesday and Friday respectively, where the sick and the afflicted, the demolished and the oppressed are brought to the house of God. Those who are brought there come because they expect God to use any of the Pastors or the Prophet miraculously for a cure or being healed. The chairman told me that the church does not oppose seeking the assistance of qualified medical practitioners or any health orders of the government.

g) DELIVERANCE:

During this time, the church observes full night prayer with the members and some of the Senior Prophets and Pastors. Their main concern is to "keep watching" as done by Jesus and his disciples. The chairman told me that it is

usually conducted on monthly basis and is a for of communicating with the lord asking for forgiveness of sin and to be re-generated. Also this enables members to gain spiritual strength and other spiritual gifts according to Paul in 1 Cor: 12:4-8.

3. WORSHIP LIFE OF THE CHURCH

a) LITURGY

The liturgy of the church is such that, done can se elements of Pentecostal way of worship. The following is the liturgy of the Apostles' Continuation Church International especially on Sundays.

1. PROCESSIONAL SONG

At this time the Pastors and the members walk into the church in a precession with processional song. They will sing until the Pastors go to their seats in the church.

b) OPENING PRAYER

The order of service on Sunday is usually programmed for the conductor. During this time the officiating ministers will ask one of the Pastor has to lead the congregation to pray in general. After that he/she will sum up the prayers.

c) WORSHIP

This is the time the worship team is called upon to lead the church through a time of worship. At this time they sing worship songs to lift up high the name of the Lord and also appreciate the Lord for all that he has done in the lives of the individual members.

d) PRAISES

During this time the praise team will take the church through a time of praises. They will sing praises and dance to the glory of God. The songs are such that the members are able to dance equally, systematically to the tune of the song. Both Adult and the youth, men and women never dance together. They dance according to age groups and males never mix with females during such times of dancing.

e) BIBLE READING

During this time the Bible lesson for that particular Sunday will be read in Twi and in English by the Bible readers. They are to read loudly to the hearing of the congregation.

SERMON

During this time the preacher for that Sunday shares the word of God together with the entire church. I was told that the sermon need not exceed thirty minutes.

g) DUES AND TITHES

During this time one of the church leaders is called to explain in detail giving biblical texts on tithes, benefits and blessing from God one receives after tithing. Also the tithe would be used to support the Pastors and to help the on going projects in the church. Tithing is not compulsory for all the members.

OFFERTORY

This is when all the congregation bring their various offerings to the Lord. Paul commanded the brethren in Galatians and in Corinth, "O the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collection when I come"(1 Cor: 16:2).

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for god loves cheerful giver"(2 Cor: 9: 7).

They also dance in the glory of God while they put their offering in a moneybox or offering bowl, which is place in front of the pulpit.

ANNOUNCEMENT

During this time the secretary of the church tells the congregation about the activities of the church for the week. All information that the members need to know is given them by the secretary during the announcement time.

CLOSING SONG

The church or any singing group is asked to lead the congregation in singing the closing song.

CLOSING PRAYER

One of the Pastors will be called during this time to do the closing prayer. Usually this is done by the Senior Pastor of the church.

BENEDICTION

This is the last thing, which is done before the members leave the church premises to their various destinations. The senior Apostle or any of the Pastors who will be called to pronounce the benediction on the members to do exactly that, which a special song is sung meaning their departure.

DAYS AND TIME OF MEETING

The church throughout the week is assigned to many activities as follows:

MONDAY:

This is one of the days the youth meet to share the word of God and also discuss issues that will help the church to grow. The time for meeting is from 7:00pm to 8:30pm.

TUESDAY

This is the day for the Youth and Women's Fellowship. They meet to discuss matters of interest and also study the word of God. The time for their meeting start at 7:00pm and ends at 8:30pm.

WEDNESDAY

During this day the church meets to study the Bible. The members on this day are taught the Bible and they are given opportunity to ask question. The worship service starts at 6:30pm to 8:30pm.

THURSDAY

This is the day the church has set aside for marriage meeting. Couples and unmarried members meet to share their agrievances with Bible teachings on marriage.

FRIDAY

This is the day for teaching and prayers. The church meets to seek the face of God. The focus on this day is to pray. They pray that God will help them in whatever circumstances that each member might find him or herself. The sick ones are brought to church this day with the expectation that God will heal them. Petitioners also travel from far places bringing their requests to God for good result. The service starts at 9:00am and ends at 3:00pm.

SATURDAY

This is another day for the Sunday School Youth. The children meet to learn Bible passages, texts and act of plays to be presented on Sunday. The time for this gathering starts at 4:30pm to 6:00pm.

CHAPTER SIX

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

LEADERSHIP

The leadership of the whole church which includes all the branches is clearly defined or stated in their constitution.

The church does not have any laid down hierarchy for leadership in general, apart from the fact that, the Apostle General is the Spiritual head of the Church. There is no one suspected to be the leader of the church or as the assistant to the Apostle General as we have in some churches.

The leadership as a whole including all branches is made up of the following:

1. The Apostle General (CHAIRMAN)
2. The Pastors
3. The Prophets
4. The Elders
5. The Evangelists
6. The Overseers
7. The Probationers
8. The Apostles
9. The General Secretary
10. The Accountant
11. The Mission Director (INTERNATIONAL)
12. The Internal Auditor.

FINANCIAL ASPECT OF THE CHURCH

The church has various ways and means to raise funds for day to day running of the church. Even before I comment briefly on the sources of income and financial control, I was told verbally by the secretary that every station has got people who take care of the finances.

For each branch, including the headquarters, has a treasurer and a financial secretary who takes care of the finances of the church.

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11. The Mission Director (INTERNATIONAL)
12. The Internal Auditor.

The above-mentioned people are those who carry the leadership role of the church. They are the sole leaders who run the daily affairs of the church. They are more liable to make sure everything in the church is going on smoothly as expected.

PASTORAL TRAINING

The church has laid down rules for overseers who prove themselves capable of the task to be selected as Workers or Pastors of church. They are to undergo at least three years Bible Training Course at the Headquarters before one is appointed a full time worker.

According to the Chairman, Clement Brakatu, some of the pastors were trained or educated in Theological Schools and some were trained under the founder of the Church late Apostle General Emmanuel Kwadwo Owusu.

The present chairman told me that courses are being run by the Senior Pastors to refresh the field or stationed pastorate in every four months. I was told over 270 Pastors have undergone training in the church's Pastoral Seminary at Duayaw-Nkwanta the headquarters. Moreover, some of the Pastors are still in some Theological Colleges and Seminaries learning to become good leaders of the church.

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For each branch including the headquarters, has a treasurer and a financial secretary who takes care of the finances of the church.

According to the chairman, Clement Brakatu, the following are the means by which the church raises its funds.

1. Collections or Offerings
2. Tithes
3. Monthly dues (DONATIONS)
4. Missionary Offerings
5. Witness Fund
6. Women's Fund
7. Children's Fund
8. Annual Thanksgiving and Harvest
9. Voluntary Contributions and Vows.

However, the headquarters of the church has one way or means by which they raise funds. That every year, the church as a whole meets at a particular branch for Easter Convention to raise funds. This is used to support on going projects at the headquarters and the administration as well. This was disclosed to me by the General Secretary of the church.

Through my interview with the chairman, he disclosed to me that all the Pastors of the church both in Ghana and overseas are not paid. All the Pastors of the church are given allowances each month. The Pastors are to find their own means to survive the economic hardship.

As a result of this, some of the pastors are privileged to embark on serious farming to make ends meet so far as their family matters are concerned.

That, all branches of the church are recommended to open Banking Accounts and to deposit all incomes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1) New aims and goals:

The church today has new aims and goal, which are quite different from what it had in the past. According to the Apostle General Clement Brakatu, (Chairman) these new aims and goals of the church are like visions or dreams of the church today. That some of the new aims and goals are as follows.

- i) The mass training of Pastors and Leaders of the church to such levels that; they can thorough holy explain the word of truth as well.
- ii) The spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all parts of the world.
- iii) The establishment of nursery, kindergarten and alimentary schools for the church and to take care of the educational needs of its members.
- iv) To provide opportunity for Christian worships along spiritual lives of the member and the general public.
- v) To establish development programmes for the welfare of both members and the general public at large.
- iv) To bring hope, peace and love in the heart, homes and community of all people in the world.

2) THE PRESENT DIRECTION THE CHURCH IS HEADING TOWARDS

According to the leader and chairman, Clement Brakatu, the present direction of the church is heading towards is the general organization of the activities of the church in an orderly manner. He stressed that this is the usual direction of the church today because the church foresees a danger in the future if things are not put in better place. That the church can go forward to achieve her future dreams. He said, in a nutshell, be believed that the church is presently heading towards growth.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EVALUATION

1) TEACHING OR DOCTRINES

a) GOD

The church has a sound teaching about God. That God is made up of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through some observations and interviews conducted of the existence of God and could explain who God is.

b) FATHER:

Also there is the need for the church to educate its members about the father. This is because most of the members have a shallow idea about the father; I was able to know these things after engaging the people I interviewed in some kind of a discussion.

c) JESUS CHRIST:

The church has the idea of who Jesus Christ is on paper and the focus of the members is solely on Jesus as their saviour. I asked one of the Pastors his theological view on terms like atonement redemption reconciliation of which he explained vividly to my understanding. Likewise a member who also explained to my surprise the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.

d) HOLY SPIRIT

The church teaches on the Holy Spirit or the personality of the Holy Spirit than any other subject necessarily taught in the church. They assume the Holy Spirit more transparent in all church activities, which is the only direction of God. And it is the Holy Spirit that worked through men to produce the scriptures. He is the one who makes them new, teaches them, and gives freedom for a new life.

e) SALVATION

Their doctrine on salvation is like that of most Christians. However I observed that there are a lot of terms in the doctrine of salvation that need to be explained very well. For example, I asked a church elder about the meaning of falling away from the grace and he could not explain sounding.

f) SIN

The church's doctrine of sins deals with breaking God's law and brings a broken relationship with God.

Sin is not a part of our original human nature, God created the first people with the ability to choose whether or not to trust and obey. But now, all people are born with a sinful nature that holds them in slavery. God sent Jesus to defeat the power of sin and remove the punishment for sin.

g) JUDGEMENT

In their teachings about judgement, they have the basic idea about what judgement is all about. Teaching on judgement is broader than what they have in their doctrines. Example, will Christians be judged or not?

And what kind of judgement if yes, the doctrine about judgement is not neglected.

h) SICKNESS

The church teaches, sickness is produced through sin, That God made the first man and woman perfect so that they would never be sick, suffer nor die. They believe that God gave Jesus to die for sins of the world and promised healing for all who turned from their wicked ways and serve God. Jesus authority is to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

i) WITCHCRAFT

The church completely condemns the spirit of witchcraft. That, no believer must be bewitched or be possessed, being a witch or wizard. Witches shall not inherit the kingdom of God for they follow the works of the flesh. Christians are strongly asked to refrain from going to a witch doctor, a fortune-teller, or necromancer nor sorcerer for any kind of assistance for they are agents of the devil.

j) THE BIBLE

Their idea about the Bible or Scriptures is sound.

However their doctrine does not explain what the scripture is and even they are talking about infallibility, what were they talking about, translation of the word or what?

k) TITHES AND OFFERING

Their believe in tithing and offering is not obligatory, rather free will giving in supporting the work of God is more required. That God loves a cheerful giver.

2. BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

a) BAPTISM:

Their belief about baptism is biblical, they practise baptism by immersion and I strongly believe that it is the way the Bible directs Christians to be baptised. Christians from other denomination who convert to the church are re-baptised because of their belief in immersion. However I was impressed about the age limit they set for children below fifteen years, infants and children are however dedicated to the Lord.

b) THE LORD'S SUPPER:

They have an idea as to what the Lord's Supper is all about which is observed every three months. That members are strongly warned not to receive the Lord's Supper haphazardly, one must testify himself or herself if one had done wrong. They are reminded with biblical teaching in support of Christ Jesus death and resurrection to save mankind. His body as a living sacrifice.

c) FASTING AND PRAYERS

This is one of the most important practices Christians need to observe from time to time. But one thing that I know is that fasting and prayers do not make people spiritual, as they want us to believe.

There are certain things like the study of the word of God and being obedient to the word of God which when added to fasting and prayer makes people spiritual, I also think that emphasis should be placed on the Word of God.

d) HEALING:

This belief of healing as one of the most important activities that is done is their services, especially their Friday service is not wrong. However my problem is that there is a lot of people who after they had been healed from their sicknesses do not come to the church again. These people lack salvation and rather become backslider. Therefore I believe that the focus should be on the salvation of the people who come to the church and then after they have been saved, they will be prayed for God to heal them.

e) PROPHECY

I believe that God is a kind of God who can reveal the future and he has done that several times, both in the past and even today, however, if a church is run in such a way that people come to the church just to obtain information about

themselves, then I think that, the priority of that church have been shifted from what it should be. Thank God for prophecies but prophecies should not be the focus for church services at any given time.

f) MARRIAGE

The church believes marriage as God's institution and must be honoured. The church does not encourage people to be polygamous which is not the divine ideal for marriage. The first couple being made male and female were designed for marriage, becoming "one flesh" in the divinely organized arrangement of wedlock.

Divorce is never encouraged in their ministry, except in the issue of adultery, which the Bible does not allow.

3. ARE THEY FAITHFUL TO THE SCRIPTURES

After my interview with the successor, and chairman of the church, some Pastors of the church and members of the church, it was glaring that they are partially faithful to the scriptures. What I mean is that there are some Bible passages and verses that they interpret and understand very well. Also sometimes they take some Bible passages and verses literally. Where they are not faithful to the scriptures, they do so out of ignorance. In fact, from my interview I can say that some of the Pastors and a large number of members are ignorant about many aspects of the Bible.

However, I will like to make it clear that there are other instances that I can say that they are faithful to the scriptures. There are some passages and verses in the Bible that they are able to treat very well though I must admit that there are some lapses at times. Also their doctrines for teaching about the scriptures portray the fact that they are sometimes faithful to the scripture.

4. PERSONAL RECOMMENDATION

After examining their constitution, as well as the various interviews I had with the chairman and leader of the church, and some of the Pastors and members, I have some recommendations to make. Some such recommendations are follows:

- a. I observed that the church has a big problem with their constitution that is the kind of things that are in it are even more difficult to understand.
- b. I also observed that the church does not have any laid down hierarchy of leadership. The church does not have anyone who is appointed to act for the chairmanship, if the present chairman is not there. I therefore recommend that the church should work hard and very fast on their leadership hierarchy both for the branches and the entire church as an organisation. After this, such information should be put or added to the information in the constitution.
- c. I realized from the church's structure that, there is not much co-ordination between all the branches of the church. They exist as if, they are separate churches. I recommend a good atmosphere be created by the people between all the branches. They should be able to hold similar programmes and do things in common, so that they will not be perceived by the people as affiliated churches but not branches.
- d. I again realised that most of the pastors of the church are ignorant about the church's constitution. Some of them have not even set their eyes on one of them. I therefore suggest that if the members will not be allowed to know things pertaining to the constitution of the church, the pastor will be made to understand fully what is in the constitution.

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- e. I recommend that studies and research programmes should be undertaken in the area of their doctrines or teaching, so that the Pastors and the members will be able to understand the doctrines to the people. I believe that if this is done well more people will even find it interesting to come to their church.
- f. About their finances, I recommend that, other owenues should be created by the church that they can raise enough funds. The church can enter into some businesses like organised farming or establishing schools that will bring enough revenue to help the church meet some of their basic financial requirements or needs. The church should also enforce the policy in their constitution that makes it mandatory for all branches of the church to send some money to their headquarters. If such steps are taken, I hope the church can increase its financial position.

APPENDIX

- 1) CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH
- 2) BIBLIOGRAPHY
N.I.V., K.J.V. (BIBLE QUOTATIONS)
- 3) INTERVIEWS:
GENERAL APOSTLE, CLEMENT BRAKATU (CHAIRMAN)
REV. SOLOMON MAYEDEN
EFFIDUASE -ASHANTI.