

West Africa Area Seminar

When the Presiding Bishop, the most Reverend Titus Pratt welcomed the 300+ women to the West Africa Area Seminar in September 2018 he commented on how the numbers had increased since the last occasion this event was held in Ghana. He encouraged us to 'be among the decision-makers' in our communities, to 'shout for peace and justice' and believe that when women speak with one voice, united by their relationship with Christ, the world listens.

As a practical encouragement from the Methodist Church in Ghana to the Federation women, a generous donation was presented to the Ghana Unit, our hosts for this Seminar, held at the Pentecost Convention Centre outside Accra.

The Seminar was attended by women from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, the Gambia and Togo Units many of whom led us in vibrant worship, dance, praise and prayer. I was particularly in awe of one woman, Fatou Kine Mane from Senegal, who had travelled alone on public transport for five days in order to attend this Seminar. It was also so good to welcome Catherine Akale, from Cameroon, who is a UMW missionary supporting women across many nations of Africa. All of us were grateful to Rev Jemima Amanor, Area President, Deaconess Aniema Udofia, Area Vice President, Georgina Donkor, Ghana Unit President and Janet Thompson, who worked so hard to make the Seminar a success.

Speakers helpfully explored the theme first introduced at the World Assembly in Houston, 'Chosen People: Called to Proclaim.' Special guest Justice Mrs Georgina Wood asserted, 'God in his infinite wisdom as placed us in a uniquely strategic position to work with him to restore hope to a dying world. We need to be obedient to be used by God for his holy purposes.' She listed some of the issues facing the people of Ghana: lack of potable water, high youth unemployment driving many to travel across the sea in search of greener pastures, corruption, tax evasion, greed..... and urged us to support one another in prayer and engage with our governments to combat injustice.

Mr Eric Appiah Okrah spoke about Human Trafficking and Sex Slavery, using story and film to drive his shocking message home. From Ghana, many young girls are sent to the Middle East as domestic workers. Globally, 800,000 women annually are subjected to sex trafficking. He urged us to be alert, to raise awareness of the dangers facing vulnerable girls and young women who (seeking a better life) are recruited, abducted and forced to work through coercion, fraud and deception and exploited by those who control them.

Mrs Gladys Ghartey urged us to recognise the 'Power of a Women's Prayer', to pray fervently and fast as Jesus did and believe that God will answer our prayers. The Bishop of Sefwi Bekwai, the Rt Rev Sampson K Gyabeng, led a bible study on 1 Samuel 25:1-37, the story of 'Abigail, a wise and determined woman'. This gentle, humble and wise woman knew when to speak and when to remain silent and wait for the right time to challenge her husband. She had the courage and wisdom to speak to David in a way that got the desired result. His anger against her husband turned to kindness and blessing towards her.

Mrs Angela Bwamena-Aboagye from the Ark Foundation, providing the first centre for battered women in Ghana, quoted John Wesley 'Give me ten men who hate nothing but sin and love nothing but God, and we will change the world.' She encouraged us to consider what makes a good leader. She identified five fundamentals of leadership, all exemplified in Jesus: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way and encourage the heart.

A gifted young woman guided us as to how healthy nutrition can lead to good health and vitality. She challenged us to teach our children how to cook healthy meals with a balanced diet.

This was the week that the body of Kofi Annan was brought back to Ghana for burial, so it was particularly poignant to be thinking of his legacy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

In the very full Seminar program, there was not enough time for each Unit to give their full presentation on progress towards the SDG that is their focus. However, we had a flavour of action in Benin and Sierra Leone towards SDG 3

health and well-being, in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana towards SDG 4 education, in The Gambia SDG1 on reducing poverty, in Nigeria, on SDG 2, towards zero hunger, in Liberia on SDG 6 clean water and sanitation.

My only regret at this excellent event was that the four World Officers present were not given opportunity to report to the full gathering on the current work of the World Federation of Methodist and United Church Women. However, we were pleased that this information formed part of our Weaving Together Program prior to the seminar and attended by a leader/representative from almost every Unit of the West Africa Area. Once more, the Ketso resource was used to set priorities for future action in the Area.

For me personally, one of the highlights of being in Ghana was to have this opportunity to return to West Africa and meet two women from the Benue Plateau State of Nigeria where I spent the year 1972 teaching in Wesley High School, Otukpo. The prayers of the children and staff at that school effectively brought me into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and had a sustained influence on my whole life since then. I give thanks even now for those Christians whose prayers and witness led to my own transformation.

