

Leading a National Church *into* Pentecostal Revival



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The Assemblies of God (AG) in Africa is poised for the greatest evangelistic and missionary advance in its over ninety-year history. Today more than 13 million people attend our more than 39,000 Assemblies of God churches in 44 nations across the continent. In the midst of this great success there is both good news and not-so-good news in the AG in Africa.

AFRICA, GOOD NEWS AND BAD

First, the Good News . . .

The good news is that our AG churches continue to grow and mature. Week by week, hundreds of new churches are being planted across the continent. These churches are being filled with thousands of new converts. At the same time, the AG in Africa is mobilizing to send an army of missionaries to the unreached tribes of Africa, and to the nations of the world. In fact, some of our national churches are already doing this!

The AG leadership in Africa believes that the time has come to, in the words of one African leader, “turn a missions field into a missions force.” We truly believe that the African church will play a major role in completing the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, of taking the gospel to every tongue, tribe, nation and people before He comes again.

Echoing the optimism of our African leadership, AGWM Regional Director, Mike McClaflin stated, “The church in Africa has grown from 2.5 million to more than 13 million believers since the 1990's Decade of Harvest emphasis. Now we are believing God to equip this growing church with the power of the Spirit through a mighty Pentecostal outpouring. . . . we hope to mobilize workers in preparation for the greatest evangelism ever seen in Africa and the world.”

Now, the Not-so-Good News . . .

There is, however, in the midst of this good news, some not-so-good news in the AG in Africa. Indicators demonstrate that there is a grave need for a powerful Pentecostal outpouring to sweep across our AG churches on the continent. Our best research reveals that only about 17% of our AG constituents in Africa have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. This means that out of our 13 million attendees only about three million have been filled with the Spirit—leaving and staggering 10 million who have yet to be filled. The spread is, of course, not even, with some churches having a higher percentage of those being filled with the Spirit and others having a lower percentage.

The disturbing truth is that most of those who are being saved in our churches are not going on to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the larger we become numerically, the less Pentecostal we are becoming experientially.

My travels in twenty countries across Africa conducting Holy Spirit emphases have revealed a disturbing circumstance: *by in large our pastors are simply not preaching and teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit.* In fact, I have discovered that a considerable number of our pastors are themselves not baptized in the Spirit.

If this state of affairs continues, grave consequences will result. Ultimately, the AG in Africa will cease to be a Pentecostal church, at least in experience and practice. Further, without the power of the Holy Spirit present in our churches, our emerging missionary movement will be profoundly weakened. If Africa is to fulfill its missionary destiny, each of our national churches must have a powerful Pentecostal outpouring.

Reason for Optimism

There is, however, reason for great optimism. My experience in preaching and teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit across Africa has revealed an encouraging fact: *Africa is ready for a Pentecostal outpouring!* Wherever I have preached the Pentecostal message, and given the people a chance to pray, many (sometimes most) are immediately baptized in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.

I am convinced that, if our 38 thousand pastors across the continent will themselves be refilled with the Spirit, and will begin to faithfully teach and preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, a mighty outpouring will come to our churches with millions of our members being baptized in the Spirit. And, if properly taught, out of this outpouring will arise an army of Spirit-empowered believers who will go out as evangelists, church planters, and missionaries to the nations. Further, millions of other newly-Spirit-baptized believers will commit themselves to supporting this army of missionaries.

A Response Demanded

The question we must now ask is “How can the Assemblies of God in Africa effectively address this pressing issue?” We must begin by looking into our own hearts. We must see

Pentecostal revival as the highest priority for the African church. As such, we, the leadership of the church, must boldly face the issue—and we must take the necessary steps to address it. The future of the church is at stake.

At a recent meeting of the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God in Malawi, AAGA Chairman, Dr. Lazarus Chakwera challenged his church’s leaders to fervently pursue Pentecostal revival “until the whole church is empowered to take the whole gospel to the whole world.” This, I believe, is the way forward.

A RECOMMENDED PLAN

With this in mind, I recommend a comprehensive response for the church’s leadership to consider. This response must fourfold:

A Biblical Response

Any plan to lead a church into Pentecostal revival, must, above all else, be based solidly on the teaching of Scripture. The first question, then, that must be asked is, “What does the Bible have to say on the subject?”

The Bible teaches that the church can reach the nations only in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tied Spirit’s empowering directly to His commission to evangelize all nations when He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

As we strategize to bring Pentecostal revival to the AG in Africa, we must take the Bible as our handbook. Early Pentecostals found their inspiration in the book of Acts. The time

has come for us to again take up this blessed book, not merely to read it as history, but to search its pages for missions strategy. Acts teaches us that the biblical answer to waning of missionary zeal in the church is a fresh outpouring of the Spirit with its members being powerfully and repeatedly filled with the Spirit! This must be our plan of action.

A Priority Response

Secondly, the issue of Pentecostal revival demands a priority response. In order for any Pentecostal leader to lead his church into powerful Pentecostal renewal he must regard the issue as top priority. He cannot view it as one among other equally-important agenda items, but must view it as “job number one” for the church. The issue of Pentecostal revival is of such significance that it deserves—nay, demands—our primary and sustained attention. The quest for the Spirit’s power and presence must be placed and remain at the center stage in the church’s planning and activities.

Jesus Himself placed the empowering of the church at center stage. To Him it was not a side issue, to be tabled and taken up at next quarter’s business meeting. In His mind it was top priority and demanded immediate and focused attention. He commanded His disciples to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:29). He commanded them further, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised . . . John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5).

We too must be gripped by this one central fact—*we must have Pentecostal revival!* All other issues must become, and remain, secondary.

An Aggressive Response

Further, our response to this issue must be aggressive. A passive noncommittal approach will simply not get the job done, nor will a half-hearted response rise to the occasion. The disciples’ response to Jesus command to “stay in the city” was not passive. It was, rather, aggressive, for “they stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:53).

We as leaders in the Assemblies of God in Africa must aggressively respond to the issue of Spirit empowering. We must do this through a determined and energetic pursuit of Pentecostal revival. We must find the means to actively encourage individual and group initiative. Further, we must persevere in our pursuit of Pentecostal renewal until the desired outcomes are achieved.

A Comprehensive Response

Finally, if the issue of Pentecostal renewal is to be adequately addressed, our response must be comprehensive. This comprehensive approach must be designed to affect and involve every person in the church. A shallow or superficial approach will never do. Our response must be pervasive, that is, it must be aimed at every facet of AG church life. Not only must it affect *every person* in the church, it must be addressed in *every available forum*, utilize *every necessary means*, and be applied at *all possible times*. Let’s look briefly at each of these four elements of a comprehensive response:

1. *Every person*. When calling our churches to Pentecostal renewal, effort must be made to ensure that every person and every grouping of people in the church is adequately targeted. In the past, similar efforts have been aimed only at “key” leaders—some of whom “buy in” to the proposals, and others who

do not. As a result the desired impact on the overall church community is not achieved.

This is not to say that leaders are to be neglected, for leadership at every level must be targeted. This includes ecclesiastical leadership, including national, district, sectional, and local church leadership. It also includes departmental leadership, such as Sunday school, men's, women's, youth, university, humanitarian, and children's ministries leaders.

Institutional leadership must not be neglected. Bible school administration and teachers must also be targeted, since these individuals are often the key influencers in the church. Any other leadership structure not mentioned must be also targeted.

The "non-leaders" in the church must also be targeted. (Note that I put "non-leaders" in quotation marks, since these people are often the real power base in the local churches and communities. Even a village mother who has no official position in the church is often, in reality, a leader in her home and among her peers).

In targeting every person, care must be given to include diverse language groups and different economic and social strata. Our effort to bring Pentecostal renewal to the Assemblies of God in Africa must reach to every member and attender in the church.

2. *Every forum.* In designing a comprehensive response to the need for Pentecostal renewal in the church, every forum and delivery system must be employed. The general assemblies and special gatherings of the church must be utilized, including general councils, district councils, sectional councils, local church services, home cell gatherings, school chapels and spiritual emphases.

Print and broadcast media must also be put to use and distributed widely. Print media could include books, tracts, flyers, magazines, Bible studies, and sermon outlines. New lessons and study guides could be purchased or produced for Sunday school and home cell study. Broadcast media, including radio (if available) should also be used.

3. *Every means.* The church must use every means at its disposal to address the need for Pentecostal renewal. In addition to those mentioned above, these means could include preaching, teaching, writing, seminars, revival meetings, and specially-called assemblies.

4. *All times.* A comprehensive response cannot be limited to a single event or even a series of "special events." One gathering, no matter how powerful or how blessed by God, will not get the job done. I recommend a sustained emphasis lasting at least two to three full years, where the church throws the full weight of its influence and resources behind this single pressing need.

During this period, various events will be planned. General, district, and sectional meetings will emphasize the need for Pentecostal renewal in the church and in the lives of individual believers. Local churches will be encouraged to have Holy Spirit revivals and to schedule regular Pentecostal emphases into their church calendars. Each year Pentecost Sunday will be promoted and used as a means to see people filled with the Spirit on a nationwide basis.

Everything done in this effort must be bathed in sustained and concerted prayer. Pentecostal revival cannot be "promoted down" or "programed down," it can only be "prayed down." Before the Day of Pentecost the disciples "were continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). Only as the leaders

and members of the AG devote themselves to earnest seeking after the Spirit will the Spirit be outpoured on the church.

Oversight Commission

In order for this initiative to work effectively a national church can create and authorize its own commission to give it leadership and direction. This commission could work under the direct oversight of the national leadership of the church. It must be fully budgeted so that it can perform its duties effectively. The name for this oversight committee could be the Commission on Spiritual Life and Mission or something similar.

The responsibility of this commission will be to evaluate, plan, implement, and promote the renewal initiative. It will also monitor levels of participation and results. It will report to the church leadership and to the Acts in Africa Initiative on a regular basis.

A WAY FORWARD

A final question: What is the way forward from here? How can church leaders implement their vision for Pentecostal revival into their national church? Here is a suggested checklist of steps that could be taken:

- ☑ *Presentation to church leadership.* The plan is presented to and approved by the church's national leadership.
- ☑ *Commission appointment.* An oversight commission could then be created and appointed and empowered to perform its necessary duties. Guidelines and funding must be found.

- ☑ *"Needs assessment" done.* The commission's first responsibility will be to do a "needs assessment" and produce a report, with recommendations, to be presented to the national leadership of the church.
- ☑ *Program design and approval.* The commission will then develop a two- or three-year master plan to address the need for Pentecostal renewal in the church.
- ☑ *Program implementation.* The program will then be aggressively implemented. This implementation must involve cooperation from all levels, departments, and sectors of the church.
- ☑ *Promotion and monitoring.* The commission's duty will be to constantly promote and monitor the progress of the initiative. At this stage the commission will seek to inspire revival in the church. It will be the commission's responsibility to coordinate efforts nationwide and to provide resources and aid to those needing assistance in promoting the revival.
- ☑ *Reporting.* One way the commission will promote the revival is by producing occasional reports for the leadership of the church on the progress of the work. Generalized reports containing testimonies, helps, and resources will also be produced and distributed widely throughout the church. These reports should be forwarded to the Acts in Africa office who will then publish them throughout the continent.

We're Ready to Help

A final word: The Acts in Africa Initiative has been commissioned by AAGA to serve you in your efforts to bring Pentecostal revival to your church. Please feel free to contact AIA with any need that you might have. We will do our best to assist you.

Two of the ways we want to help you is by providing inspiration and resources. Part of our mission is to “fan the flames” of Pentecostal revival in Africa. One way we hope to do this through a new publication called the *Africa Azusa Report*. Our desire is to gather revival reports from our churches and to disseminate them throughout the continent. As you hear what God is doing in other places you will be inspired to continue to seek Pentecostal revival in your own country! The same will be true for others.

In order to do this we must have your help. We will need to know what the Holy Spirit is doing in your country and in your church. Will you help by sending to us regular reports? Also, we will need the e-mail addresses of as many people in your church is possible (beginning with you!) so we can send the *Africa Azusa Report* to them.

AIA also hopes to provide you with resources to help promote Pentecostal experience and practice in your churches. These resources could include many forms, such as videos, tapes, books, study guides, tracts, etc. Human resources could also be included. We are seeking to locate men and women full of the Spirit and focused on the mission of God who you can use to teach in Holy Spirit conferences and to preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Whatever your need, let us know. We will do our best to help you.

Our Hope

Our hope is that as a result of this conference, thousands of our AG members throughout Africa will be powerfully and genuinely baptized in the Holy Spirit. As a result, renewed vitality will come to the church. The church will again be empowered and equipped to participate fully and effectively in the mission of God. The evangelistic, church planting, and missionary efforts of the church will be revitalized and will surge forward. This is our sincere prayer.

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