

# CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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February 7, 2019

Dear Brethren,

We recently returned from the latest International Leadership Program (ILP) in Elmina, Ghana. This was the fifth in our series of conferences. So far, we have conducted these meetings in Guatemala City, Guatemala; Monterrey, Mexico; Santiago, Chile; Manila, Philippines; and now Elmina, Ghana.

There are five more conferences scheduled for this year making a total of 10. The next five will be in Auckland, New Zealand, for the South Pacific region later this month (February); Kigali, Rwanda, in June of this year for French-speaking Africa and Kenya; Johannesburg, South Africa, in July for southern Africa; London, England, in August for the U.K. and Europe; and Montego Bay, Jamaica, in August for the Caribbean.

We have a critical need for leaders in all congregations, including ones in the U.S. But without a college or central place for education and learning, our needs in international areas have grown to the point of crisis. We know that future ministerial leadership will come from within the membership of the Church, but in many areas outside the U.S. the membership is relatively new to the truth. Therefore, the teaching of the basic doctrines is extremely important.

On the Sabbath during the conference in Ghana, we held services for 289 of the local members. We have more than 700 people attending in the country of Ghana, and we have four full-time pastors. Those attending in Ghana, like those in many other places, have a varied background. Some came from a Seventh-Day Pentecostal background; the majority came from the Church of God (Seventh Day); and there are some with a Protestant, Sunday-keeping background.

We have been working with the pastors in Ghana for approximately 20 years. When we began, they were not observing the holy days, and their format for services was different from what we teach in the Church of God. Over the past 20 years, we have seen considerable growth. One of the major issues that we must address is the lack of local church elders serving in the Ghanaian congregations. In most congregations in the U.S. we have local church elders available to conduct services if the pastor is in another congregation, but that isn't the case in many areas outside the U.S., and certainly not in Ghana.

For my sermon on the Sabbath I spoke on the subject of unity. I made reference to an African proverb that I first discovered while watching the movie *The Good Lie*, which is about the escape of a group of refugee children from the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. The proverb goes like this: "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." The proverb points out the importance of people working together.

I used two primary scriptures: Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" And Acts 4:32, which describes the New Testament Church shortly after Pentecost: "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

The importance of working together for a common cause cannot be overstressed. It is certainly missing in our world today. This is not new. Back in December of 2012, I wrote the following in my letter to you:

Unity is often discussed these days but rarely seen at any level of society. Here in the United States during the recent election, at the very top level of our government the president was accused of dividing the nation and creating what is being called class warfare. One can debate what part President Obama played in the division compared to other government officials and political parties, but there is no question that our nation is divided.

It is as though I wrote that paragraph last week! If you substitute President Trump for President Obama, it would be an apt description of today, only things are worse. It takes a concerted effort to work together and avoid the division that we see all around us. Satan is very active. In John 8:44 Christ lays the confusion and division in this world squarely at his feet. “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

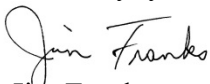
Visiting Ghana reminded me that the continent of Africa is particularly susceptible to violence and government upheaval. Virtually every election is met with demonstration and turmoil. It is said that African leaders rarely leave office peacefully. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the current genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan demonstrate the extreme level of violence that has occurred on this continent. There are very few stable governments and the economic plight of people in many countries sometimes results in starvation and malnutrition. Of course, Africa is not alone. Violence, division, hatred and turmoil are experienced on every continent.

While Ghana seems to have it better than many countries, it still has its challenges. It is one of the richest countries in the world when it comes to natural resources—gold, diamonds and extremely rich soil. So, what is the problem? One should not oversimplify the situation by identifying “one” problem, since several need addressing. In most cases though, it boils down to leadership. Much could be resolved in every country if there were loving and caring leaders who worked together for the good of the country rather than for selfish desires.

The root cause of the world’s problems is the same one that we fight against: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

In order to effectively preach the gospel to the world and care for those whom God will call, we must be unified for a common purpose and always fight against the common enemy!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,

  
Jim Franks