

# **AN EVALUATION OF THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH AND PROPOSAL FOR ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Introduction**

Let us remind ourselves of Eccles 4:13-14, "A man may rise from poverty, to become king of his country, or from prison, to the throne." In a much simpler term, can God use a nobody like a drug addict, an alcoholic, a violent man, or a jailbird, for His glory and purpose? Would an outcast, who was rejected by society, and regarded as the scum of the earth, be of any use to God? Would a guy, who frequents the nightclubs with whoremongers, rather than having leisure with his family, be of any use to God?

What you are about to read is of how God Almighty, in his own sovereign grace, has used an indigenous Papua New Guinean, whose qualifications are listed in the above paragraph, to establish churches in this last decade, which have now become known as the Evangelical Christian Fellowship in the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Perhaps it may have been the first of its kind in the history of church planting in Papua New Guinea.

The Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Churches is unique, in that it is not affiliated with any foreign mission agencies or missionaries, but it truly originated in Papua New Guinea, for which, due glory and honour is to God. Indeed, we can say it is awesome, marvellous, and exciting for us to see how God can use nobodies, like jailbirds and outcasts, in an extraordinary way.

As you read through this article, it is my prayer that the Spirit of God will warm your hearts, motivate, and provoke you, also, to become partners in this onerous task of church planting, throughout Melanesia and abroad. This paper, though it is not lengthy, is believed to be ideal as a resource, and a legacy for readers in the years ahead.

### **A Church is Born**

“Brothers think of what you were when you were called, not many of you were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the lowly things of this world, and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Cor 1:26-29).

How important are those words, for they proved themselves true in my life. All the days of our lives were numbered in God’s book before the foundation of the world. God, in His omniscience, knows us all. He knows beforehand when He can use us to His glory. He works, through His Spirit, in the lives of all people, wanting all to be saved, and all to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

I can remember seeing the faithful, living hand of God. Even today, my heart is filled with praise and thanksgiving for all that God has done for me. How much patience and grace is needed on God’s part for a person to begin to realise the intention of His love. I thank Him from the depth of my heart for having opened my eyes to His wonderful love, grace, and faithfulness. May all that I write serve to glorify Him, and may it be a testimony of His abounding grace, care, and providence.

### **The Turning Point in My Life**

I will never forget what happened on Friday, April 7, 1982, which was to change the course of my entire life. The judge’s deep voice broke the silence, thundered, and echoed throughout the courtroom, “Defendant found guilty as charged. To be imprisoned, with hard labour, for two years.” The unexpected happened, I almost had a heart attack. How well my defence counsel, and my witnesses, defended me was all in vain. I couldn’t believe the sentence that was pronounced on me. I assumed that the judge had erred in his verdict.

But why did this happen? The day before the case, I consulted my ancestors, for their aid and protection, I had gone through the ritual with the magic man, I had prayed to Mary, and the saints, to pave the way for victory in my coming court case. More than that, I had my defence counsel. If I have done all these, why were the gods so annoyed as to allow my imprisonment? Surely, something must have gone wrong within the system. My faith, confidence, trust, and respect for my religion, and my ancestors seemed to mean nothing but a fraud. But no, I must not dismiss Mary and the saints, otherwise, I might enter into more and deeper mischief.

My heart was broken, my hopes, dreams, future, and my beloved wife and infant son, were all but a shattered dream. Would I be able to ever see them again? Let the gods alone decide. She can go for some one better than me, and raise her child. It would be many months before I would see her, and, by then, I would be totally forgotten. Who am I anyway? My reputation, credibility, seniority, and status had already being smeared, and stamped with the sentence imposed upon me. The world does not need me anymore. Let me go to whatever is called prison, be forgotten, and never return, and perhaps die at the hands of the brutal jail keepers.

As I was escorted toward the awaiting prison van, the April sun, shining brightly in the clear blue sky, seemed to fade, and became dim. The atmosphere, the environment, and the scenery that used to be charming and lovely, seemed distant to me. I felt, deep down in my heart, that the whole world was uncompromising. As I walked past the crowds, and my fellow colleagues, police friends, and others shook their heads, and nodded, which, I guessed, was an expression of sorrow and farewell. The whole scenario was but gloom and doom.

### **My First Prison Inmates Fellowship**

Barawagi jail at Kerowagi, in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea, was well situated on a hill toward the national highway. It was well fenced, so that not even an animal would gain entry. Those inside would have their flesh torn to shreds, if any attempt was made to cross over the razor-sharp, barbed wire. Tears filled my eyes as I stood staring at the sun, as it lazily set toward the western horizon.

The bell was rung at 4:30 pm. We were pushed into a cell, and locked in for the night. I was handed a blanket, stained with vomit, so the odour was terrible, but, as there was no other option, I had to make use of it for the night.

For the first time, in the pitch darkness, I heard a deep, queer, humble voice, which I have never forgotten, and which, ever since, I will always cherish in my heart. “Brothers, it’s true, we are trouble makers, but God loves us, He sent His one and only Son, who died that we might have life. If we confess our sins, God will forgive and cleanse us.” The sermon was short, brief, and ended with a short benediction.

Would God really hear the prayers of a bunch of criminals? Who is this Jesus Christ? Did God really love us? Did He really love me? Can He really forgive me? But that is impossible, God is holy, He cannot tolerate sin. That’s why we all end up here in this God-forsaken institution. It is all nothing but a nightmare. But, night after night, Brother Teine<sup>1</sup> would encourage us, and pray with us. Somehow, his message shook, and compelled me, so greatly that I decided to search for this God, who could forgive, cleanse, and, more than that, love me.

### **Searching for God**

I was summoned to the visitor’s porch one weekend to meet my family. It was a joy to have our brief reunion. I requested my office Bible on my wife’s next visit. Now that I had access to the Bible, I read it daily, and, to my amazement, I found great encouragement and truth in the scriptures. My eagerness and enthusiasm made me lose my appetite for lunch on many occasions.

Since I was attached to the nursery section, there was sufficient time for prayer and meditation. I would recite each Hail Mary 60 times, and Our Father daily, by the Catholic prayer book I borrowed from an inmate. My determination and eagerness was to have a face-to-face encounter with the God, who loves, and who sacrificed His son on my behalf. Daily, I searched through the scriptures, prayed earnestly, and I

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<sup>1</sup> Teine Siwi comes from Sim village east of Kerowagi in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea. He comes from an SDA (Seventh-day Adventist) background, and was on remand, though I am unaware of his crime (he was later released).

attended Mass every Sunday. I would ask many questions about faith, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. With the answers from the priest, I would search the scriptures, to see if they would match. Those were the most challenging, exciting, and fascinating times, but for how long would my search continue, I did not know.

### **An Unforgettable Trip from One Prison to Another**

Prisoners engaged in specialist duties circulated news of transfers. The focus was on the long-termers, and it was uncertain as to which prison the transfers would take place. I was disturbed, in case my searching for the God who loves would be in vain. My acquaintance with the prisoners, in sharing and praying, would be handicapped. Would there be opportunities available at the new prison for enrichment and enhancement to my relationship with God? Somehow, I believed Mary would intercede with Jesus that I should remain.

Unfortunately, on a bright July morning of 1982, we were summoned to board a waiting Toyota 6000 truck, I packed the few items I possessed, notably my precious Bible, two shirts, and a pair of shorts into a pillow case, not being aware of our destination. As I boarded the truck, and got my self settled, the same queer, deep, humble voice seemed to speak to me repeatedly: "God loves you. . . . God is with you, and will not forsake you." As I turned to that odious cell, where I heard this voice the first night, tears started to roll down my cheeks. "God, but why, why do you have to do this? Why transfer me?" Haven't you heard my prayers, haven't you heard Mary and Jesus? Why did you have to remove me from an environment, with which I have gotten well acquainted?

Slowly, the truck descended the hill, as my temporary home vanished behind the hills, but I could still recapture some of those sweet memories of my meditation in the nursery, and that fateful night. The guards interrupted my thoughts, and told us that we were bound for Baisu Corrective Institution at Mt Hagen in Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, some 30 miles west of Kerowagi in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea.

### **Life at Baisu, and My First Contacts**

After a few weeks, Baisu proved to be a fertile ground for me. There was light all night, I could read my Bible for as long as I wanted to, cell fellowship was consistent, Bibles, tracts, and guitars were in abundance, many of which I later learned were donated by Prison Fellowship, and other para-church organisations. I got involved with Prison Fellowship from the start.

I got well acquainted with Paul McArthur,<sup>2</sup> who was a very gentle, humble, and sensitive person, who was always ready, and more than willing, to answer all that I would ask of him. At the same time, there was progression, and improvement, in my personal prayer life. I could counsel, and share, from the word, and commend to the Lord, those inmates, who were due to be released the next day.

I was so engrossed in the Bible that I read from Genesis to Revelation several times. Apart from that, there were tracts and good teaching by various truly born-again Christians from the Prison Fellowship ministry. The jail keepers and fellow inmates complimented me for my changed life, enthusiasm, and eagerness for the scriptures. In actuality, I should say I was still searching, and every moment of the day I rose to new heights.

### **The Day I Met Christ**

About four o'clock one Sunday morning, as I was praying and meditating on the book of Psalms, something unusual and amazing happened. As I sat with my eyes closed, something like a sticky tape on my forehead gave way slowly and gently, as though someone removed it deliberately. I was feeling rather strange, and sensed an inner joy and peace that was beyond my comprehension and explanation.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul McArthur was Corporate Director of ATA (Alliance Training Association), based in Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, and Coordinator for Prison Fellowship Ministry to Baisu Prison. He was also the son of the founding Principal of the Christian Leaders' Training College of Papua New Guinea, near Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

Paul McArthur came with his friends that morning, and, in the course of our fellowship, I was challenged by one of the brothers who shared (whom I later came to know personally as Geoff Williames).<sup>3</sup> So, there I was, at the crossroads, wondering whether to accept or to reject. I was unsteady, and sweated all over, but, at the end, I decided I would give my life to Jesus Christ. I accepted Christ as my Saviour and friend that morning. At long last, I met the God who loves, for whom I had been searching with all my heart. I was saved, truly saved.

### **How It All Began**

God knows how He has to lead His people. He also knew what was good for me. That was why He guided me during the days of my imprisonment. He led me in a completely different direction. I realise, today, how good it was that God did not allow my plans to come to fruition, but His plans, just as the apostle Paul thinks of the good start the believers have made in their Christian life. He is confident that God will finish the good work he has begun (Phil 1:6). Man may give up a work he undertakes, but not God.

The work, which His goodness began,  
The arm of His strength will complete,  
His promise is yea and amen,  
And never was forfeited yet.

Augustus M. Toplady<sup>4</sup>

### **Into Freedom**

As the day of my release was nearing, I seemed to struggle between two worlds. What would the free world offer me? How would my former colleagues classify me? How would my immediate family's reception be, particularly when I did not attend my father's funeral? It seemed best to remain in prison, rather than to expose myself to the free world.

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<sup>3</sup> Geoff Williames was a businessman from Victoria, Australia, who was a friend of Paul McArthur. Both became instrumental in helping me in my early Christian life.

<sup>4</sup> W. McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996, p. 776.

Paul McArthur made prior arrangements for me to be picked up after my release. Not knowing what lay ahead, I bid farewell to my fellow inmates for the last time, hurried towards the open gate, boarded the waiting car at the porch, and sped away into freedom.

Paul McArthur was all smiles as I entered his office. We greeted each other, and discussed issues of mutual interest for the next 15 minutes. I also had the opportunity to talk to Geoff Williames from Victoria, Australia, who also rejoiced, and encouraged me to really rehabilitate back into society. After a cordial reception, encouragement, and prayers, I was geared to face the challenges ahead.

My first experience of having dinner with white Christians was with the McArthurs. What intrigued me most was when Paul's little boy was asked to pray over our dinner. I was wondering whether God would accept a child's prayer. I thought it worthwhile if I could teach my son to do the same. I am indebted to their love and hospitality, over the years, when I really needed them. I learned so much from them.

### **Sad Family Reunion**

Our family reunion was a season of sorrow and heartbreak. It was all gloom and doom. My heart bled, and tears rolled down my cheeks, as I hugged my widowed mother for the first time in five years. I felt as though the future promised us a state of oblivion. Life was not worth living for me. We walked over to my father's grave. I sat there, paused, and focused, as those sweet memories flooded my mind. I thanked the Lord for giving us an industrious, generous, wise, and a resourceful father.

Now that God had called him home, to whom should we go? Who would be our fortress, our refuge? This was the darkest hour of my life. How on earth would I manage a large family? All eyes were upon me. They were more than willing to obey what I had to say. That widow and those orphans were at my mercy.<sup>5</sup> Our destination was uncertain.

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<sup>5</sup> The widow and the orphans refer to the writer's mother, brothers, and sisters.

Veronica,<sup>6</sup> and my mother, were both great women of perception, who were industrious and constructive during those perilous times. They would always ensure that we wouldn't go begging. Life began to promise better times for our future. My older brothers sought employment elsewhere. I kept the promise I made to my mother, until the day I left for Bible college.

### **Personal Witnessing**

Over the first few weeks of bereavement, my spiritual temperature declined. So many earthly issues also deprived me of my quiet time with God. Likewise, readjusting to a new environmental setting, particularly in a village, wasn't that good for me.

Somehow, I revived my quiet time with the Lord, by constant prayer, after toiling in the garden to reinforce my spiritual strength. My daily life also seemed to attract other's attention. Many enquired why I didn't take alcoholic beverages anymore, or smoke, or gamble. I would cordially share about how I found Christ, and what He did for me.

I would try my best to be generous to everyone. We would invite folks to our house for meals and prayer. Frequently, the men's house<sup>7</sup> was an option for me to share Christ with men of all ages. I would sit with young people in market places, or other places of gathering, and share about Christ, and His saving power. Those, who were curious and enthusiastic, would come, in private, later, and, on many occasions, I led them to Christ.

The first place for me to share the gospel was at home. I would encourage my mother, wife, and children to pray together, though they didn't take it for granted at first. The family spread the word, and others came to our house fellowship, and, gradually, the fellowship grew. Songs, sung from the hymnals every night, ignited, and

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<sup>6</sup> Veronica Wago is my wife. She comes from Kogai village, west of Kundiawa town, in the Simbu Province of New Guinea. She hails from a decent and well-respected family. They were supportive in our times of peril.

<sup>7</sup> Men's house is a building for all males. As in our custom, the man must not sleep in the family house. The men's house was a place where initiations took place (which is not so common now). This was one place we found to be fertile ground for witnessing.

prompted, others to come to our fellowship, who then made first-time commitments to follow Christ.

### **Our First Church**

One Sunday morning, after a service, some of the brothers approached me, and enquired about building a church, because my house would no longer accommodate the large group of believers. I had to dismiss their proposal, because building materials were costly, and manpower was inadequate. It would also look bad in the eyes of the Catholic fellowship, and they would accuse us of sheep stealing. But, deep down in my heart, I was afraid. I feared that being a pastor, preaching from the pulpit, and before crowds, was not my calling. I was not born to be that. Exposing myself to the public would be a disgrace, because I was not an eloquent speaker, so I did my best to brush aside this proposal.

However, the brothers insisted, and persuaded me to agree. Unless I agreed with their proposal, they would disassociate from the fellowship, so I was somehow being forced to give in.

The brothers kept their promise. Land was acquired, and, in the space of one month, our new church building was completed. That fear of incapability struck me again. How was I going to organise my pastoral duties? I didn't want to preach from the pulpit, as it was the first in the history of my life. I was in total confusion as to where, when, how, and what I would actually do. Did I have to affiliate with other churches? I was also afraid about remarks from those who opposed me. "What is that creep doing? What is that convict up to?" It was all a nightmare for me.

Glory is due to God. He gave me the boldness, clarity of mind, and wisdom I needed. I preached from the pulpit, and Christians were all smiles, and proud of the new church. Sunday after Sunday, people poured into the church, and many gave their lives to the Lord. In three months, we extended the building again, to accommodate 150 people.

## **Why the Churches are Growing**

In our contemporary world, people seek brilliance, and special qualifications, for church planters. However, at times, God passes by the person, who, from the human perspective, would be the most qualified to do the work, and, instead, He uses unlikely instruments. God was brewing up something unique, preparing us for pioneer church planting.

## **The Place of Prayer**

Prayer is right at the heart of the Christian life. Our Lord spent much time in prayer. In John 17, we see Christ's priestly prayer. He made intercession for His people. His petitions related to spiritual things. Likewise, in almost all of Paul's epistles, he mentions prayer, which was vital in his life and ministry. He encouraged Timothy, and the church, to pray for all people (1 Tim 2:4). As Christians, it's our responsibility to pray to God on behalf of our unsaved friends and relatives.

Prayer has been found to be an essential element in every situation in pioneering church planting. In the early 1960s, missionaries, working in the Green River area of Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea found that prayer was a vital part of the ministry, right from the beginning.<sup>8</sup> Through much prayer, Christian Brethren churches penetrated through the West Sepik and the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Other church planters, like Dick Grady and Glen Kendall say that, "The more time spent in prayer, the more effective is the church planter, regardless of field difficulties."<sup>9</sup>

The prayers of other people also affect church growth. There were Christians in Australia praying for a few believers of the ECFC that the church would grow, and it did. A letter, written to the believers in 1984, read in part, "God has a plan for you all. As you maintain a deep

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<sup>8</sup> Dennis Thorp, and Barbara Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea: 1951-1995*, Auckland NZ: Dennis & Barbara Thorp, 1996, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Dick Grandy, and Glen Kendall, "Seven Keys to Effective Church Planting", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28 (October, 1992), p. 366.

experience by quiet time, Bible study, and prayer time, you will grow stronger.”<sup>10</sup>

And, several years later, among many other letters, the same author encouraged the believers that they were being prayed for daily. “I want you, and your elders, and deacons, and believers to know that you are all often in our prayers and thoughts.”<sup>11</sup>

Here we see that these people have experienced the power of prayer, and likewise encouraged the believers to take the same initiative. They expressed the necessity of private and corporate prayer. Years later, Anton Bre was asked, “Why is it that ECFC is growing so much?” His simple answer was, “It’s because of the global prayer warrior.”<sup>12</sup> This believer was aware of the effectiveness of prayer in a broader perspective.

Now, all this is an indication that prayer is a priority. Likewise, in the ECFC context, the pioneer believers initiated prayer meetings, praying earnestly for their relatives, and friends, and the whole community, to know Christ. God’s Spirit convicted many. There were people coming to the fellowship and Sunday services. Church growth accelerated, and numerical strength increased. Prayer meetings in believers’ homes had a dramatic impact. Relatives and friends came to Christ. God also answered believers’ prayers, by healing the sick.

With much prayer and fasting, believers took the word to market places, and preached with boldness, and saw their faith rewarded, as they saw people raising their hands to receive Christ as their Saviour. Other believers, who had prayed for their relatives for years, found that their prayers were answered. There was a brother, who came to the Lord, after 13 years of consistent prayer. Without prayer, nothing would have been accomplished, no church would have been planted.

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<sup>10</sup> Geoff Williames, elder, Warragul church, Australia, letter dated 01/02/84.

<sup>11</sup> Geoff Williames, elder, Warragul church, Australia, letter dated 06/04/92.

<sup>12</sup> Questionnaire, 23/07/2000, Anton Bre, elder, age 35, ECFC, Gumine, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

### **The Place of Scripture**

All human beings have to learn the way of salvation, through the scriptures. The assurance of faith comes through the Word of God, and makes men and women wise. That is why Paul draws out its importance in 2 Tim 3:16-17.<sup>13</sup> So it is a key seed, from which our understanding of church planting should grow. Church planters use different methods of biblical teaching and evangelism in pioneer church planting. Wayne Gute tells of how the chronological method of Bible teaching was taught, and the impact it had with Guatemala's Mam Indians. The director taught Genesis at one of the Mam retreats, as he related it to their context. Those courses answered their questions as to origins about the world, the human race, the entrance of sin into the world, the confusion of languages, and the beginning of the Hebrew nation, then the coming of Christ, His ministry, death, and resurrection, and then Pentecost.<sup>14</sup>

Or, it can be "regular systematic teaching of the Bible",<sup>15</sup> as related by Dennis and Barbara Thorp, which proved to be a fertile ground, preparing the advance of the gospel in Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea, which, today, has about 200 Christian Brethren churches. This was how the knowledge of God was provided, and the faith of the indigenous people was developed and multiplied.

There are many avenues of using the scripture, to bring people to the knowledge of Christ. Not all avenues will prove to be useful in all places and cultures. In the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea, the people already had a fair knowledge of God and creation, but their knowledge of Christ, and having a personal relationship with Him, was shallow. They still held on to ancestral worship, magic, polygamy, and adultery.

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<sup>13</sup> "All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

<sup>14</sup> Wagne Gute, "How the Churches Grew in Guatemala Mam Indians", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 32 (April, 1996), p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> Thorp and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea*, p. 27.

The believers were encouraged to buy Bibles in Pidgin, and read on their own. When they found out the truth, they encouraged their families and relatives. The message they had in their own Bibles was the very message being preached to them. Though they read in Pidgin, they shared in their own language, which enabled the believers to teach and preach, in their own vernacular, to their own people.

God called dedicated men and women, and anointed them for ministry among their own people, providing fellowship and encouragement, to maintain the unity of purpose, with freedom to develop their own lives. It was through this effect that Towa William came to know the Lord. When asked, “What do you think are the strong points within ECFC?”, he replied, “It was the word of God, preached, that stirred and provoked me to become a Christian, and go to ECFC.”<sup>16</sup> Over the years, the believers of ECFC have been praying that the scriptures would be translated into their own vernacular.

### **The Place of Tribulation**

In Acts 8, we read that the Jerusalem church began to suffer cruel persecution, instigated by Saul, and the believers scattered, and went everywhere (Acts 8:4). From the human perspective, it indeed was a dark day for the believers, because a member of their fellowship had been killed, while others were being chased like pigs.

When we look carefully from God’s perspective, this event was like a peanut planted in the ground, which would reap much fruit, as a result. The persecution was like scattering the seeds of the gospel to distant places. If it had not been for the persecutions, the church in Jerusalem would not have branched out.

Likewise, Wayne Gute tells that persecutions amongst Guatemala’s Mam Indians “meant being put in prison for a time for preaching the gospel in market places and public squares, or it meant economic

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<sup>16</sup> Questionnaire, 21/07/2000, Towa William, age 35, elder, Kimeb church, Kerowagi, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

threats”,<sup>17</sup> but the result was that it became the means of the rapid growth of the churches of Guatemala.

John Nevius relates that, in China, when native Christians persisted in asserting their purpose to follow their own convictions, resulting in brutal assaults, house burning, and driving Christians from their homes,<sup>18</sup> the result was that they sustained their Christian identity, by overcoming evil with good. Here, we realise that persecution brings multiplication.

During the inception of ECFC, severe threats from major religions were experienced. Tribal fights were the worst. When Christians refused to fight, they were threatened with the loss of communal land, or were made a laughing stock, and were cast out, or their lives were threatened. If one died in the fight, it would be the believer’s life that would be taken.

However, in the midst of this, the believers stood firm in their faith, like lights across a wide expanse of a heavy-populated area. The real fruit was that many souls were won to Christ. One particular believer escaped to another district, witnessed to his relatives and friends, and planted another daughter church. Those, who studied the situation, began asking several questions, “Do we follow our leaders, and fight, and die? Do we stay with the mass? Should we pay attention to the Evangelicals?” There was openness to a new message, which did not exist before. This prompted discussion, rather than confrontation, and furthered the gospel in the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea.

### **The Place of Self-Governing**

In this section, we will discuss the three basic elements of indigenous church growth. Paul, in his missionary enterprise, established many indigenous churches. The methods Paul used are relevant to us today in any culture. In fact, indigenous methods are New Testament methods. William McDonald, in his commentary on Acts, states:

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<sup>17</sup> Gute, “How the Church grew in Guatemala”, pp. 193-194.

<sup>18</sup> John Nevius, *Planting and Developing of Mission Churches*, Nutley NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958, pp. 45-46.

Local churches were established, wherever people responded to the gospel. These assemblies gave permanence and stability to the work. They were self-governing, self-financing, and self-propagating. The apostles revisited the congregations, to strengthen and encourage the believers, and appoint leaders (Acts 14:21, 22; 15:41). In their missionary travels, the apostles, and their associates, were sometimes self-supporting (Acts 18:3; 20:34).<sup>19</sup>

He went on to say, “Every local assembly, in the early days of Christianity, was autonomous – that is self-governing. There was no federation of churches, with a centralised authority over them.”<sup>20</sup> There were no denominations, and denominational headquarters, like we have. Each local church was directly responsible to the Lord. When Paul left the infant believers in Thessalonica, they were instructed in the doctrines of the faith, and left on their own (Acts 17:1-10).

Melvin Hodges further explains that the Thessalonian church “functioned without Paul. More than that, there is no evidence that Paul had appealed for funds to erect church buildings, or support workers, who were to pastor the new churches, or even pleaded for one from Antioch or elsewhere.”<sup>21</sup> They functioned on their own. The head of the church, the Lord Jesus, directly governed each one.

Self-government means indigenous leadership, evangelism, and pioneering church planting, so that each particular local church is able to sustain itself, without foreign support. William Smalley defines the nature of an indigenous church like this:

It is a group of believers, who live out their life, including their socialised Christian activity, in the pattern of the local society, and for whom any transformation of that society comes out of

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<sup>19</sup> McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 443.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447.

<sup>21</sup> Melvin L. Hodges, *On the Mission Field: The Indigenous Church*, Springfield MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953, pp. 9-10.

their felt needs, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the scriptures.<sup>22</sup>

In the light of the above statement, one of Alan Tippett's core principles, in the production of leaders in a local church, is:

The strength of the Island churches lay in the fact that they produced their own leaders at every level. Only when converts are effectively incorporated into the church fellowship, and provided with opportunities for participation and development, can this be made.<sup>23</sup>

Incorporating converts into the church, and providing them with opportunities, is vital for multiplication and growth in any church. We recapture what Paul did with the infant believers in Thessalonica. Scripture indicates (Acts 17:1-10) that he was there for only three weeks, but we may presume that, as the converts were incorporated into the church, he may have provided opportunities for participation. If he hadn't, then that congregation of believers wouldn't have been sustained through crisis. Every believer, born into God's family, is unique, regardless of educational qualifications, seniority, status, and whether young or old, is not a problem with God. God equipped each convert with some kind of gift, to participate, and contribute, to the whole body. This was what happened with the ECFC.

ECFC was planted in early 1984, in a rural setting. It was the result of the witness of a foreign brother, but it was not he who brought about the pioneering of the church. Through his convert, the Lord brought in other believers, and incorporated them into the church. There was no foreign influence in its inception or partnership, no clear guidelines or directives were incorporated. None of the believers, in its inception, had any theological training, or any formal education. They were

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<sup>22</sup> William Smalley, "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, p. 496.

<sup>23</sup> Alan R. Tippett, *The Deep Sea Canoe*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1995, p. 138.

ordinary men and women of the village. But Christ was in their midst, and in control.

The early believers stood firm in their faith, and witnessed boldly for Christ. Church growth accelerated, and numerical strength increased. The indigenous believers proved they had the capacity to govern themselves. They wondered what should be done. The Holy Spirit led them back to the Bible, and they realised that the sole responsibility was in their hands. The management, welfare, teaching, and the furtherance of the gospel, were within their capacity.

Prayerfully, believers, with potential and special gifts, were chosen, and were prayed over, just like Paul did, when he revisited the local churches (Acts 14:2). The ministries were drawn from the scriptures in the light of 1 Tim 3 and Tit 1:5-9. The Holy Spirit burdened their hearts. They were more than eager to govern the church, without reserve, and unsalaried. This was the inception of the first governing body of the ECFC.

Their own way of worship was structured, prayer meetings were initiated, and Bible study groups were formed, lives were being transformed, and many people were involved in the ministry. This confirms what Melvin Hodges said about the capability of indigenous believers managing their own affairs

To assume that any native church perpetually requires constant supervision by a missionary is an unintended insult to their capacity to manage their own affairs. The most primitive tribes have some form of local and tribal government, adjusted to existing conditions. Necessity and common sense, even among the most backward and primitive, have so required. How much more, then, may those same natives, now washed by the blood of Christ, enlightened by the word of God, and filled with the Holy Spirit, give wise administration to the church and community.<sup>24</sup>

It was a thrill to see uneducated villagers taking on onerous responsibility for the King. This enabled Christians to arrive at a clear

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<sup>24</sup> Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, p. 18.

understanding of Christian faith and conduct, though they had no written set of rules or doctrines. These unwritten doctrines and rules were acceptable to all the believers. They had a common understanding and agreement as to the points they considered vital for all believers to adhere to. The foundation of self-government was laid with the first church. Over the years, all the other daughter churches have been able to manage their own affairs, with their own indigenous pastors and elders taking full responsibility. The same principle of self-governing also applies to them. The standard of doctrine and conduct is always the converts' expression of the concept of their Christian life, as they find it in the scripture, and not a belief of any foreign missionary. This has a powerful effect on evangelism and growth.

However, there is a central body, known as the executive board, that is comprised of a pastor, and his assistant, and two elders from each local church, to oversee the welfare and functioning of the churches. This board also has no foreign influence whatever. This executive board deals with problems and needs, spiritual or physical, and its decisions are final.

### **The Place of Self-Propagating**

William McDonald, in commenting on Acts 14:21 while elaborating on the truth of the church, and its importance in God's program, says, "A proper missionary programme has, as its aim, the establishing on the field of self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating churches. This was ever the purpose and practice of Paul."<sup>25</sup>

Here we see that the New Testament church was self-governing, as we saw in our preceding section, and we see that the New Testament churches were self-propagating. Paul only revisited the churches to build up the believers in their faith in Christ, by teaching and preaching.

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<sup>25</sup> McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 442.

Melvin Hodges also went on to say that, “Self-propagation is the vital element of the missionary program. It is the true object of missionary endeavour. A church that does not propagate itself will soon die out. New Testament churches were self propagating.”<sup>26</sup>

This has been so true with many of the local churches. Melvin further emphasises that, “Indigenous church principles recognise that the local church unit is the best medium for evangelism. When we have established a local church, with all its rightful and inherent vigour, we have followed God’s own method for propagating the gospel.”<sup>27</sup> Yes, propagating is, indeed, the vital element, and is a mark of a truly indigenous church.

Only when the young local church has seen itself as being directed by the word, and is enthused to look beyond its boundary, then it is a divinely-ordained unit in that particular area, in which God may choose to work. That was what has been happening with ECFC. However, in a broader view, we focus on the Pacific Island missionaries, who propagated the gospel in Papua New Guinea. Those island churches were truly indigenous, and were true churches. Alan Tippett explains further:

Does the young church see itself as being directly addressed by the words of the great commission? This was a matter in which the young churches of the South Pacific excelled. From Tahiti, and Tonga, from Samoa, Rotuma, and Fiji, national missionaries moved out into the West. It was this that the gospel spread as far as Papua New Guinea.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting to see that the Pacific Islands’ churches were God’s unit in the Pacific for propagating the faith, and the island national missionaries were content to work within that context. It is somewhat parallel to the apostles in the book of Acts.

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<sup>26</sup> Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Alan R. Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1987, p. 381.

ECFC saw that new converts had the potential of witnessing for Christ. They were enthusiastic, and eager to share their new-found faith with their relatives and friends. They were seeds for a potential harvest, in the light of Matt 3:38.<sup>29</sup> It was those new converts, whose witness during the week brought friends on Sundays. Seeing this trend, the church encourages new converts to spend time with God, read their Bibles, witness, and bring others to Christ.

The believers are encouraged, with opportunities and participation in all activities in the church: flower girls, sweeping and cleaning around the church, visitation, sharing, and leading in home groups, and realising that activity and responsibility makes the church grow, as it develops in the process. Precautions are taken not to dampen the enthusiasm of believers, as it was discovered that work done by a believer could wither and die out. Pastor John was a good example. A week after his conversion, he was encouraged to share, and lead in a home group, and has now become dynamic in his pastorate. He was asked, "What is it that makes you go to ECFC church?" "I go to Evangelical Christian Fellowship, because God had chosen me, and put me there to serve Him."<sup>30</sup>

John was given an opportunity to participate, and, in his service, he has proven his capability. Believers were prompted by the Holy Spirit to go in pairs to share their faith in the surrounding villages. The 2 Tim 2:2 principle<sup>31</sup> proved to be very effective. One of the daughter churches was established through this method in another village, and the main church has to sponsor a lay worker to take up the responsibilities there.

The believers in that daughter church went all-out for God, still applying the 2 Tim 2:2 principle, and were heavily involved in open-air preaching, and personal witnessing. The result was that two other

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<sup>29</sup> Matt 13:38, "The field is the world and the good seed is the people who belong to the King" (GNB).

<sup>30</sup> Questionnaire, 21/07/00, John Angai, age 33, area pastor, Tembogai Evangelical Christian Fellowship church, Kerowagi, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

<sup>31</sup> 2 Tim 2:2, "Take up the teaching that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witness and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others."

churches were established. A lay worker from the first daughter church was sent there to become a full-time pastor. One other means of the 2 Tim 2:2 principle is the man-and-wife team. A Christian couple took the initiative to visit, and witness to another couple, who gave their lives to Christ, and converted their house into a church. That is how another church, in another province, was established. The husband is an elder in that church, and his wife is dynamic in coordinating and tutoring TEE<sup>32</sup> in their area.

The home also is a very important force in the Christian life (Col 3:18-4:1). A believer, who lived a considerable distance from her church witnessed to her family and friends, and opened her home for house meetings. The main church assigned a lay worker, making him responsible for the home group, and to report the progress constantly.

Months later, there were many converts ready to be organised into a church, and they requested permission from the main church. Permission was granted, and the lay worker, who was instrumental, became their pastor. Church land, and land for subsistence farming for the pastor, were allocated by the believers. Food and tithes for the pastor were also negotiated and confirmed.

This was a full-time ministry for the pastor. Two things happened. We not only have the new church, but a new worker as well. The pastor, in turn, appointed elders and deacons, and began sending out the converts into the neighbouring villages. The process began all over again, with the gospel reaching an ever-widening area. Much of the success is the product of the labour of the indigenous converts. The pastor and elders see the necessity of teaching their own converts, so that they will all have a clear vision of the work of the church. Converts are encouraged, and pushed into active service, so that they, themselves, would know how to establish a group of converts, and form them into a local church, without the aid of a missionary, or any other official.

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<sup>32</sup> Theological Education by Extension (TEE). It is done by tutorials, in groups, or can be done as isolated students. It is useful for both believers and seekers.

### **The Place of Self-Supporting**

Self-supporting is the New Testament method. In their missionary travels, the apostles, and their companions, were self-supporting. Acts 18:3 tells us that Paul supported himself by tent making, and, in Acts 20:34, Paul says that he supported himself, and also his companions, in their needs. This illustrates that, though the local churches sometimes supported them (Phil 4:10), they were not controlled by the local churches. Self-support is an apostolic method. Melvin Hodges says,

We find no hint that the churches among the Gentiles were supported by the Jewish congregation. Instead, we do find that the Apostle Paul solicits funds from the churches he founded to help relieve the distress among the famine-stricken saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Rom 15:26), a striking contrast to today's procedure.<sup>33</sup>

Here we see that the Jerusalem church did not support the Gentile churches in any way. We could also presume that, though the Gentile church had its own financial burdens, it was more than willing to assist the saints in Jerusalem. Should the indigenous church be self-supportive, or seek funds from elsewhere? Alan Tippett gives us another beautiful illustration about how an indigenous church supports itself.

I ought to mention that most of the building costs were carried out by the local church, itself. No overseas funds were used. It was the responsibility of the people to build their dormitory, and, if the roof leaked, the principal of the school would send a message to the people, who would soon come to the island with the necessary materials, and the building would be repaired. They tried to make the school self-supporting.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>34</sup> Tippett, *The Deep Sea Canoe*, pp. 149-150.

This is a story of an indigenous church that was self-supportive in running a Bible school. The burden was laid upon the indigenous church, itself, to meet the requirement of the school. This was also true in the Sudanese area of Java in Indonesia, as related by Warren Chastain.

The fellowship collected their own funds, and built a separate building, at some sacrifice. Unfortunately, one night it accidentally burnt down. A few years later, properties were bought, which still stand. A full-time evangelist, supported entirely by the church, leads it.<sup>35</sup>

This is a church in an unreached Muslim area that is self-supporting. It is fascinating to see that their full-time evangelist is entirely supported by the fellowship. The burning of the building was not the end for them; they acquired new property. In another situation in Africa, Paul Pearlman wrote regarding the financial relationship of the Barunda people.

OCMF (Overseas Christian Missions Fellowship) aims to preserve the financial autonomy of the convert in relationship to himself, his family, and his peers. Economic structures should, at all costs, be preserved. The convert is told from the beginning that Christianity will only be credible among his Muslim friends if he stands without foreign financial assistance.<sup>36</sup>

Expert missionaries believe that, without self-support, an indigenous church will die. During the inception of the ECFC, there were few believers, but their enthusiasm and eagerness, motivated by the Holy Spirit, prompted them to build a meeting place with a thatched roof. It was amazing to see believers taking responsibilities in their own hands, at the outset. One believer allocated a portion of his land for the

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<sup>35</sup> Warren Chastain, "Establishing a Church in an Unreached Muslim Area", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, p. 693.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Pearlman, "Reaching the Baranada People of Barunda", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, p. 705.

building, and others contributed material. Their cooperative effort resulted in the building being put up in less than two months.

After three years, the thatched-roofed church deteriorated and leaked during rainy seasons, and the land on which the building stood was being disputed. The believers met, prayed, and sought God's direction, and wrote for donations as well, but those circulars that were sent out were in vain, as there was not much response. Eventually, after intense prayer and fasting, they came to realise that the responsibility was in their own hands. As Christians, they had a role to play. They felt the sense of responsibility, and the privilege of giving sacrificially, to support the work of the church.

They began to pool their resources: in terms of pigs, chickens, coffee bags, vegetables, bananas, and taros, and contributions of money. All those items were sold, and, with the money, they bought land (one acre), and built a permanent church, with an iron roof, and a pastor's house. This was a tough experience for most of the believers. However, churches that sprang up later followed the same pattern.

Indeed, over the years, five daughter churches sprang up, two in another district, and one in another province. The same pattern was followed. Believers really felt the pain and suffering of bringing the churches to maturity, believers, who were employed in the public service, had to use much of their resources, voluntarily, without reserve. Some of our resources were donations from our Australian friends. Their donations were focused on literacy materials, audio tapes, and training materials. Though limited in amount, much appreciation is due to them, however, the bulk of the labour was laid upon the local believers themselves.

Believers were encouraged to tithe, and give generously toward the work of the church, and were taught to give, after they made their commitments to follow Christ. It was remarkable to see a keen believer, who had his tithe deducted from his salary, and directed to the church account, for the allowance for the pastors.

To ease the financial constraint, attempts have been made to place pastors into their own district, with the same dialect as the congregation. This brings about mutual understanding: believers living harmoniously with the pastor, with no distinctions, everyone living on the same level.

However, there are also hindrances. The pastor sees that preaching and teaching is an onerous task that requires much of his time, and less time is given to his self-support ventures, in terms of finance. The senior pastor of Barawagi church was approached recently, and asked, "What do you think is the weak point, which needs addressing in the ECFC churches?" His response was, "The church needs money to function, to expand, and extend, to penetrate to the unreached with the gospel."<sup>37</sup>

Although, over the last couple of years, the church, with contributions from individual believers, established a poultry project, and a store, to combat the pressing financial problems, this still needs to be developed, because management is poor and stagnant. There is no place for begging here. They are indigenous, they are self-supporting, but the going is still hard, particularly in their economic enterprise. Ross Clemenger explains:

Missionaries have long defined the indigenous church as one that is self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting. Envision the indigenous church as a three-legged stool with the three "selfs" forming the legs. Three-legged stools are handy implements round the home and farm. We used to sit on one to milk the cows. Sometimes one leg was broken. It would still be used with only two legs, but the milker was then put in a precarious position, somewhat at the mercy of the cow. There is a parallel between such a stool and the indigenous church in the developing world.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Questionnaire, 21/07/00, Joseph Genebare, age 35, pastor, Barawagi ECFC, Kerowagi, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

<sup>38</sup> Ross Clemenger, "Self-Support: The Missing Leg in the Development of Indigenous Churches", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 13-1 (January 1977), p. 13.

The church needs capital from believers and friends, to boost it economically, and to encourage the believers to be economically self-reliant. Where the church wants to move forward in evangelism, there is still a deficiency in this area, but this is not the end of the world. The believers are looking forward to minimise this lack. What Hodges says seemed to be so true of ECFC: “The native church, left to its own, of course, has to suffer. It has to struggle, and sometimes its efforts seem to be so feeble.”<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps there may be no option for ECFC, but the only avenue is the Lord’s way, the biblical way. The church should go back to tithing and offerings. The generosity of believers will move the church to new heights. However, praise God, ECFC has been sustained through awkward and perilous times, but has been self-supporting over the 17 years of its life.

### **The Place of Leadership Development**

Training and development is essential in our Christian context today, because it is an ongoing need for every aspect of church life, and for producing potential leaders. ECFC recognises that it was essential to build on this, and generate enough indigenous leaders to ensure a continued acceleration of their church-planting programme. It is appropriate to repeat what Paul said to young Timothy (2 Tim 2:2). Paul here encouraged Timothy to go on faithfully for the Lord, but more than that, he was to provide for the spiritual growth of others. This was now his responsibility to transmit to others the inspired teaching he had received from Paul. Paul admitted teaching Timothy, in the presence of many witnesses, knowing that soon he would leave his earthly body, and Timothy would have the responsibility of imparting the same message of the gospel to reliable men, so that the task of evangelism would be an ongoing process.

Training and development is not easy. It requires a divine calling, and strength. In every church, God gives His gifts to men and women, with the potential and capability to lead, with the diverse gifts He has entrusted to them. God works in unique ways in any culture, but the

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<sup>39</sup> Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, pp. 69-70.

product is the same, preparing men and women for leadership in His church, for the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many missiologists, and expert church planters, have come up with various views and aspects of training and development of leadership. John Nevius says:

Young converts, before they are advanced to positions of prominence and responsibility, should also be trained. The processes of proving and training, though quite different and distinct, are carried on simultaneously, and largely by the same means. This training includes not only study, but work, trial, and, perhaps, suffering. It should be such as will fit a man to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Nevius voiced a core principle of how a leader develops, particularly in the area of trial, work, and suffering. God raises strong, faithful, and dedicated leaders, through enduring the storms of life. Any Christian leader, who hasn't gone through suffering, and who is not prepared to do so, will never last. There are men and women believers in ECFC, who, for many years, have gone through severe trials and persecutions, who now comprise the leadership in the governing body.

When God calls a leader, and develops him, He looks at the heart, and not the physical appearance, or educational qualifications (1 Sam 16:1-13). Melvin Hodges made a contrast between the theologically-trained, and an illiterate, with moderate schooling at home, and found that the theologically trained does not last long in a village setting, and longs for the comfort of an urban life:

Whereas the local man, with a moderate amount of schooling, has no such trouble. Having being brought up in the district, they are part of the community. They are familiar with local customs. They speak the local dialect, and eat the local food. Moreover, their shops and homes are there. This gives stability to their work, and stability always makes for permanency.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Nevius, *Planting and Developing of Mission Churches*, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, p. 5.

Likewise, God has raised up men and women with a moderate amount of schooling, through apprenticeships, participation, delegating of responsibilities, and mentoring for years, who have now become dynamic in ministry and leadership in their own culture, and with their own people, and in their own communities. We may object about people, with little or no training, not doing things in a proper way, yet we see Paul trusted them, and ECFC has proven this over the years. However, this does not mean that theological training should be neglected. In fact, the writer of this paper is from ECFC, and has attended the Christian Leaders' Training College at Banz, near Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

One of the best missiological minds, Alan Tippett, reflects some of the best principles of the role of an indigenous leader. He has this to say, when referring to a Fijian church:

I believe that one of the strengths of the Fijian church has been the fact that the leaders had a little more knowledge than the rank-and-file of the people. I say "a little more" because it is dangerous if the leaders are too far above the level of the people. In many lands, the mission of the church has failed, because people are living at a simple farming or fishing level, and their pastors have high university degrees, which do not relate to the occupations of the congregation. Certainly, leaders must be better trained than the people, but just enough so as to preserve their rapport, and inspire others to reach a higher level. This means that it is better to find leaders from among the people, than from outside. A leader has to identify with the people, and integrate within the social group with whom he works.<sup>42</sup>

In the light of this statement, particularly the last two sentences, it is both interesting and confirmative, because ECFC has developed leaders from their own area, where the church is planted. The church realises that, in sending pastors from one district to another, some find it quite difficult to adjust, but developing and training a local person from among their own people gives positive results.

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<sup>42</sup> Tippett, *Deep Sea Canoe*, pp. 143-144.

Secondly, if the qualifications of the pastors mirror the level of their own people, and they take their pastorates as an onerous task, entrusted to them by the Lord, they will be keen to minister to their own people.

Throughout ECFC, men and women are chosen as leaders from among the converts. While participating in their role, they are assessed, as to their capacity. If proven in their capability and performance, they are entrusted with permanent ministries in the church. They are to be recognised as a person truly transformed by God. They must be people of mature judgment in the community, and ones who have understanding of their own race and culture.

Mature leaders take converts with them to camps, conventions, and other Christian gatherings, for them to get a broader view of Christianity. They have to eat, sleep, and travel together. The church has discovered that converts learn more from attitude than words. This was one of the best principles to develop leaders, and impart knowledge and vision to them. Of course, that is not only to develop pastors, but leaders for every ministry the church needs.

Pastors and elders are encouraged to solve difficult problems that may arise in the church, and are provided with adequate leadership advancement, and the responsibility of decision-making is also thrust upon their shoulders. The principle is “learn by doing”. The church discovered that it should put them to work, even though they may not be experienced, to allow them to make mistakes, so that they are able to learn how to deal with the administrative and other problems in the church.

The church runs quarterly leadership refresher courses, to add more skills to their lives and ministries. The leaders come with the understanding that, when they go back to their churches, they are to communicate what they have learnt to their congregations, and to build better public relationships in their communities.

Distance Theological Education by Extension (DTE) has become one of the fundamental correspondence courses for the last decade and a half. The headquarters are at Banz, Western Highlands Province,

Papua New Guinea. ECFC leaders have done many of the courses, and have proved the worth, by becoming dynamic Bible teachers in their respective churches. These courses ideally suit all environments, both urban and rural. For ECFC, this is the only means of theological training for Christians and leaders, except for the writer, who has completed a Bachelor of Theology at CLTC.

### **The Future**

Discipleship, training, and an ECFC commercial enterprise are keys to the future of ECFC. Prioritising these essential aspects, and the implementation of them, is its agenda for rising to new heights in the area of evangelisation and church planting.

### **The Area of Discipleship**

Jesus told His church to go and make disciples. ECFC belief is that we have lost sight of this command (Matt 28:19-20) as a priority. It is not just that we are good at it. We no longer recognise that it our calling. Disciple-making, is, of course, a process that requires an extended time in an individual's life. However, the process cannot begin if we are not bringing new people into the church. ECFC believes this is a top priority. The only proven method of bringing new people into the church is for us to recognise the importance of doing church planting.

Experience has proven that God calls men to discipleship, according to His own divine will, regardless of our educational qualifications. ECFC has seen that God chooses men and women, and places them in different locations, environments, and geographical areas, where those disciples would perform to the best of their abilities, through on-the-job training. In most cases, sufferings, trials, and hardships have produced genuine, reliable, fearless, and dynamic leaders.

An ECFC view of the process of discipleship for the future needs to be formed. That means moving away from concentrating on our personal and private development, and investing ourselves towards a life of usefulness to God, serving Him, and seeking first His will and kingdom. Individual members of ECFC need to appreciate their call, and realise that there is no limit to what God can do with a life lived for Him.

### **The Area of Training**

Training of leadership is also a key strategy for ECFC's future. Over the last decade and a half, the church has concentrated on training indigenous church leaders, by way of apprenticeships, mentoring, and on-the-job training.

However, the Distance Theological Education by Extension courses offered by CLTC are the minimal theological education provided by the church. This has been the only means by which our leaders have been educated. It has proven to be fertile ground, because of its practicality and incentives. In addition, the course brings enrichment and enthusiasm to both tutor and students. ECFC has its own tutor, who tenderly encourages new students in their endeavours. The ECFC has produced many dynamic leaders more quickly where churches were planted, as it keeps up with the growth through DTE.

In the future, ECFC is aiming to set up a rural training course programme. A team of two or three can be responsible for the teaching of the courses. Someone visiting the ECFC for that purpose can also conduct it. It is further anticipated that DTE course notes will be used in these programmes. Each church will be responsible for selecting its own participants. Due to the increasing number of young people coming to churches, with a higher level of education, ECFC is looking forward to sending students to English-language Bible colleges. Likewise, those with a moderate level of education will attend pidgin-based Bible colleges.

Leadership of the ECFC rests heavily on the training of future leaders. That is a big challenge. Once the younger people have been trained, opportunity must be given for them to grow in the life of the church, and to work their way up into positions of responsibility. Therefore, the older leaders must be willing to accept the new approaches that the younger workers may bring, and be willing to share their position and authority.

### **ECFC Commercial Enterprises**

The church has taught indigenous officials to administer the church, and informal education is provided to educate on how to conduct business meetings, or organise a church, and coordinate the evangelistic activity.

However, to generate funds for evangelistic activities and church planting, in addition to pastors' subsidies, the church has initiated a trade store, and a poultry project, through tithes and offerings. The project has actually had a decline in progress and development over the last five years, due to inadequate skills and expertise. This gradually resulted in the closure of the trade store. The poultry project is not doing very well. No financial statements and reports have been issued.

Over the last couple of years, the church has grappled with its self-support programme. The pastors are usually given minimal support, and there is no money available to finance evangelistic efforts. Caught between the church's desire to extend evangelistic and church-planting strategies, and the woeful lack of funds, the church wonders who could, and can, share their money-making ability and know how, so that they can support the church. ECFC needs to revive its commercial enterprises.

## **Conclusion**

That is as far as the story goes, but it is not the end. It will not be finished until the Lord comes again to take His people to be with Him in heaven. ECFC members need to remember that it is only 14 years (1986-2000) since the inauguration of the first indigenous church in 1986, with five daughter churches being planted within a short space of time. How the story continues depends on whether the members walk strongly with the Lord, and serve Him faithfully within the church family. It is envisaged that every member should have equal rights and responsibilities for the future story. Whether it will be as exciting as the first 15 years rests on the earlier work of the faithful and dedicated indigenous leadership. It is an exciting story, but what can we learn from it? Perhaps it is an appropriate time to take stock.

A significant lesson that stands out through this paper is that God is a God of great power and might. He has shown His power, in the way He uses ordinary men and women, in a totally indigenous society, by the changes that the gospel brings. The power of the spirits has been broken; people have changed their cultures, as they learn what the Word of God says. Family life has been transformed, and individual lives had been renewed. This reminds us of God. Are the members of the ECFC experiencing that power today? We learn a great truth from Mark's gospel, "The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord walked with them, and proved to them that their preaching was true" (Mark 16:20). That is what the faithful workers of ECFC found, too. God has powerfully walked with the indigenous people, who went all out for God.

In conclusion, the exciting thing for our visitors to ECFC has been to see the people in the word of God. People have the scriptures in their hands. With any matter that is under discussion, a clear relevant statement from the Word is accepted as the final word. This commitment to biblical authority is the greatest asset of ECFC, as it faces the challenges ahead.

It's worthy to quote the ECFC motto, "And so I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

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