The ACF Outlook

Newsletter of the African Christian Fellowship - USA

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Family: A Gift to Hold and Cherish

Joseph Princewill

Director, Building the ACF family and Community

None of us had to negotiate the family into which to be born. It is a divine occurrence. No bargaining was necessary, no monetary offer needed or fleece test required to determine the geographical birth place, race or skin color. It is a gift of God. When was the last time you sincerely gave thanks for your family?

The biblical Adam had no idea about how he was formed or how come Eve stood beautifully before him as he awoke from sleep. None of that was necessary, for it is a gift. You don't have to do anything to get a gift. God gave more than a gift. His gift is not just any gift. He gave the gift of Life. The gift of life to exist deserves a grateful response.

Eve was a gift to Adam and Adam was a gift to Eve. It was one glorious moment, as they behold each other for the first time. There was no best man or a chief bride's maid. There was no discussion on the design of the outfit to wear. There was no honey moon destination planned. There was no human choir present, but the birds sang in unison a melodious anthem. The triune God watched the whole event unfold with a smile of approval. He presided over it and ordained the very first institution, the institution of marriage and family.

What God has joined together let no man, or woman, or material thing put asunder!

Within the context of family God gave us the opportunity to life and be alive for the purpose of having fellowship with Him. That purpose is the vision of the African Christian Fellowship, USA. Like the family, the African Christian Fellowship (ACF) is a unique organization comparable to a living organism.

Family units within ACF are thriving and experiencing the favors of God. I recall vividly my experience at the first local ACF affiliate that I was privileged to be a member of. The year was 1983 and there was only one child born to our group. Today, by the grace and mercy of God, the number of children, youths and young adults have more than doubled the parents.

The mission of ACF in passing the legacy, connecting with the continent and building bridges must begin in the family. While we embark on a much broader task of reconnecting with the continent across ocean divide, we must take the simple step of connecting within our individual families. While we build bridges of solidarity across cultures, we must begin by building bridges of intimate relationship of affection, love and care between spouses, between parents and children.

The strength, success and victory of our family are directly proportional to our prayer life. Little prayer little power, much prayer much power. Several years ago, my wife told me a simple but true story. As a young adult she would pray for her would–be husband. She would ask God to keep him, protect him and watch over him, whoever he is, wherever he is. When praying over a meal she's about to receive, she would ask God to provide what to eat for her would-be husband. Then, I showed up. The rest, as they say, is history.

Today, I am the beneficiary of much prayers stored up for me even before I became a husband and father. I have a better understanding of my position as the priest and prophet in our home to be a blessing to my wife, our children, our family, the ACF family and the body of Christ at large. The place to start is the family alter. Has the fire burnt out at the family alter? Or you don't have a family alter? You cannot afford to keep the family without one, not to talk about leaving home without the backing and support of the family prayer alter.

Each of us has a unique role within the family. You have been strategically placed in your family. Either married or single, you are part of God's family. As a husband or father, make your lifestyle a sacrificial gift. As a wife or mother make your life count as a gift. As a son or daughter make your decisions and choices a profound gift of honor. You are a gift intended by God within the institution of family to demonstrate a permanent, life giving relationship that reflects the image and character of God in your Jerusalem - the place you call home. The gift of family is invaluable, it is priceless. Never take it for granted. Embrace it, hold it, and cherish it. ⌘

Editorial

The hour has come, and it is now. With remarkable courage and perceptive sense of judgment, ACFUSA has redefined its vision and mission. This unprecedented stance in the history of ACFUSA is reflected in the reports from its recently concluded regional conferences and national leadership summit. Indeed, ACFUSA has demonstrated its resolve by placing the right perspective on its home and foreign responsibilities, as it wisely embarks on well-designed, strategic efforts to take on the formidable challenges of building Africa and African descents worldwide. However, it has been noted that building the families, nourished and maintained by effective prayers, remains the fundamental step in a cascade of vision-empowered plans directed towards realization of the noble goals of ACFUSA. As its new name depicts, The ACF Outlook presents ACFUSA's perspective on current issues of interest regarding its membership and missions (particularly in Africa). The articles in this issue of The ACF Outlook are revealing, revolutionary, and rewarding. Read on and be refreshed both in mind and in spirit.⌘

ACF USA Leaders Parley on Capacity Building for Africa

The recently concluded leadership summit of the African Christian Fellowship USA, Inc., held at Washington Dulles Hilton, addressed capacity building issues, policy problems and opportunities in the areas of economic development, agriculture and environment, health, education and information technology in Africa. The theme of the conference was "Come Let Us Build" [Africa]. Several panelists and facilitators, who are not members of ACF, made highly valued presentations and contributions at the Summit. Dr. Chris Lodewyck from South Africa, one of our three main guest speakers, challenged ACF leaders to develop strategies that can influence leaders in Africa. He gave many examples of how the Church was fully involved in the rebuilding process of South Africa subsequent to the collapse of apartheid. David Ameyaw, our second guest speaker from Millenium Challenge, Inc., spoke on how ACF is an important vehicle that God wants to use to transform Africa. He expressed that ACF leaders are men and women of integrity with abundance of energy and capacity for unrestraint development of Africa. The presentation by Ruth Kagia of the World Bank on educating the whole man was enlightening. The premise of her presentation was that the emerging new leaders in Africa are result-oriented in terms of HIV/AID reduction, growth in education, economic development, poverty reduction etc. The days of perpetual self centered leadership is ending. Africa, indeed, shall be saved. Therefore, to accelerate this expectation, manpower development and educating the whole man must be pursued vigorously. ⌘

Wumi Iledare, Ph. D.; *Chairman, Conference Planning Committee*

Editorial Corner

Guidelines for Submitting Articles for Publication

1. Articles may be submitted via email at any time to the editorial committee member from your region or directly to the NEC Chair / Editor-In-Chief (*newsletter@acfusa.org*).
2. Acceptable articles shall have a maximum of 300 words, preferably in Word format.
3. Articles may cover the following content areas of the newsletter:
   - Reports of activities from regions and chapters.
   - Educational and informational materials that would be helpful to the individual member, including, but not limited to, such subjects as insurance, health, immigration, investments, etc.
   - A chat corner or food for thought.
   - Youth forum.
   - Testimonies.
4. Submit newsletter articles to *newsletter@acfusa.org*

Editorial Policies and Procedures

1. The editorial committee will endeavor to include articles from across the regions.
2. All publishable articles may not get published right away, given that space is very limited.
3. Quarterly Newsletters will be issued by January, April, July, and October of each year.

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2006 Regional Conference Reports

East Region:

The 2006 East Region Conference was held at Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Cherry Hill, New Jersey from 6th through 9th July.

With our theme: ***Building A Community That Impacts Generations***, about 350 attendees gathered to celebrate our God, our ACF Family, our 15th year history, and our vision. Our guest speakers: Dr. Vincent Anigbogu, Secretary, ACF-USA Board of Directors and Mr. Afam Eruchalu, Director, The Threshers Team, Nigeria, spoke on: Understanding God's Purpose for Africa, Positioning ACF to Fulfill Mandate, and Establishing Collaborative Partnership for Positive Outcomes. We also conducted three concurrent workshop sessions with several topics – all addressing our conference theme from different dimensions.

We give all the glory, honor, and praise to our God for gathering us, for visiting us in such a powerful way, and for granting all of us journey mercies. Blessed be His Name. Amen.

George Bassey
President, East Region

Midwest Region:

The conference was held at the newly renovated Legacy Retreat & Conference Center of the historic Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville Kentucky from Thursday August 3 through Sunday August 6, 2006. The conference theme was "**Strengthening the family foundations.**" The conference was holistic in nature as it covered both the physical and spiritual needs of our families. High-

lights included **Family Banquet**, **Health fair & group health care**, and **Three Mile Walk** which was a first of its kind in our region. It was truly satisfying as well as hilarious to see the outfits for the walk. Some were properly dressed for the event. Some had no clue. Some came with a Bible in hand. Most completed the walk; some only went halfway and withdrew citing leg cramps and other age related issues. In all, it was great fun and a good bodily exercise.

The Oratorical Challenge & Celebration of Gifts and Talent were showcased by our young adults displaying their gift of writing.

There were responses to alter call as well as rededication. Given the current situation of African families in the US today, the conference was timely and it adequately addressed issues we currently face. Overall, it was a huge success to the glory and honor of the Lord alone for answered prayers.

Sunday Olayinka
President, Midwest Region

South Region:

The 2006 South Region Conference was held at Beaumont, Texas, from July 1 – 4. Based on the registration, 270 people attended the conference. The main focus of the meeting was on unity for the purpose of executing the purposes of God. One of those purposes is mission work to reach the unreached, particularly in Africa, for Christ. We believe our people went back with enlightened focus.

Enefiok Umana
President, South Region

West Region:

This year's conference took us to the beautiful Bay Area of California. As always, the speakers came armed with the latest communication gadgets and inundated us with data concentrating on the State Of The Continent. One aspect of the information that was very unsettling was the average life span of the African immigrants in US compared with the entire society. The expert put it at 50 years. We were cautioned to first look at rescuing ourselves so that we would be fit to address the issues of the continent. **In view of this, we were asked to change our lifestyle and take a critical look at the "pounded yam" portion and the bowl of soup, which was placed at 3000 calories per serving**. This conference turned out to be the most attended ever. The leadership covered the young adults' expenses and that had the unintended effect of bringing out the parents in a remarkable number. By the way, it was not all works. We had time to take a tour of the historic and beautiful Golden Gate Bridge and the World's Most Crooked Street in San Francisco.

Linus Ojukwu
President, West Region & ACFUSA Board Member

ACF Midwest Youth Articles

With remarkable insights, undaunted faith, and unwavering hope, four Nigerian-American Teenagers wrote thought-provoking essays, which were presented as part of a youth contest at the African Christian Fellowship summer camp in Louisville, KY, on Saturday, August 5, 2006. What's your own story of being African in America? This issue of The ACF Outlook features one of these reflective works as Part I. The remaining essays will be continued in subsequent issues.

Being an African in America: Reflections of four Nigerian-American Teens – Part I

My name tells a story. What story does yours tell?

So we've all been there. First day of school, substitute teacher, work, even our every day lives. We've all been through it. We sit there, watching the individual with the list of names, just awaiting the look of panic and the pre-apology for mispronouncing our name. We know that they are about to butcher our names, so we raise our hands quickly, so in an effort to prevent both our embarrassment as well as theirs. What does it mean to be African in America? Well, it means many things. But one thing that I believe is constantly overlooked is our names. What's in a name?

Due to the constant mispronunciation of our names, we are forced to do four things. First, we begin to go by nicknames. My best friend growing up had the last name Ayarinola. The unforgiving students called him granola bar until the day he graduated. For a long time, instead of calling me by my last name, Awoniyi, I was called ADub, AW, and A&W rootbeer, Awana-eat, I wanna wewe. The only thing that they have in common is that they all start with an A. Close, but not quite. I guess with nicknames it helps the individual over compensate for their lack of pronunciation ability.

Second, we go by the meaning of our names. My good friend, Ifedayo, went by love all through middle school. Good thing her name was not Joke.

Third, it forces us to get tired of cringing every time our name is slaughtered and we just begin to pronounce it however it will make it easy for them to say. Tomi become Tomy, Lara to Laura. Will it ever end?

I have to say, though, out of all these, the fourth is the worst. We change our names all together. For the first ten years of my life, I was called Seye, or rather Sheya as the average American pronounced it. Then after that, I began to be called Mary. Now to the African community, I'm Seye, but to everyone else, I'm Mary. And you all know exactly what I'm talking about. How many Graces or Josephs do you know?

Through my short life, I have begun to realize what slowly happens to us when we change our names in order to accommodate others. We slowly conform. We slowly forget who we are in hopes of making them (*others*) happy. Although it is merely a minute change, our name is our identity. Our name is who we are.

19 years ago, Funso Awoniyi gave birth to her second daughter. This child almost did not make it; there were doubts concerning not only her survival, but also a successful birth. But after labor that lasted for what felt like forever, the proud mother was able to hold her baby in her arms. She named that baby Oluwaseye. Oluwaseye: God has done something great / something worth celebrating. Not Nancy, not Beth, not Jessica, but Oluwaseye: God has done something great / something worth celebrating.

True, being an African in America means that my name is constantly slaughtered. Yes, it means that I constantly have to just shrug off the fact that at times it feels like the individual is not even trying to pronounce my name correctly. But you know what? It also means that I am unique. It means that my name is a large part of who I am. It means that my name not only represents me, but it represents my family, my people, and the struggles that we have overcome. It means that my name is part of something bigger than I am. It means that my name is well; it's my name. And I take pride in that (*my name*). Oluwaseye: God has done something great / something worth celebrating. Again, for emphasis, Oluwaseye: God has done something great / something worth celebrating. My name tells a story. What story does yours tell?

Seye Awoniyi, 19
US Army ⌘

One Year After Hurricane Katrina —

A Testimony of Hope by the ACF, New Orleans Chapter

Out of a trial comes a testimony

Hurricane Katrina – the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States. The images and accounts of utter devastation, and human misery, beamed across the world from all imaginable news media, could only capture a part, a very small part of the real thing. All the greenery of trees, shrubs, and grasses was turned into grey, roofs were detached with ease like hats blown off bald heads; houses were removed from their foundations like cooking pots plucked off their tripod stands, and the wholesome, busting life of the city of New Orleans was replaced by the eerie silence of destruction, death, and the stench of decay.

On August 29, 2006, the one-year anniversary of the catastrophic event, the blazing headlines in the news media, once again, focused on the events of hurricane Katrina. It is hard to believe that it has been a whole year since the world of all New Orleanians came to a standstill, and lives and circumstances became changed forever.

The African Christian Fellowship (ACF), New Orleans Chapter and its members were not spared. Prior to hurricane Katrina, our Chapter was on fire for the Gospel and engaged in building a loving, caring dynamic Christian community, and enthusiastically implementing the cardinal objectives of the ACF, USA. Our newly acquired 3.1 acre piece of property became a vibrant Community Center with structures and a large open space for various activities, and to God's glory, was used as a helicopter landing pad by the Mayo Division of the US Army for rescue operations during the hurricane Katrina crisis.

Our Community Center is located in a zone officially classified as a no-flood zone, not requiring flood insurance. ACF, New Orleans Chapter, obtained only hazard insurance coverage for the Community Center, as required by the mortgage company. The unusual events of levee breeches that lead to the massive flooding buried the 6,000 sq. ft. House of Worship, and a 2,400 sq. ft. Multipurpose Building in water and mud. We lost everything!

Operation Ezra and Nehemiah

The estimated cost of repairs of the ACF Community Center buildings was conservatively put at $157,000.00. With no insurance to cover flood damages, and no grants from the State or Federal Governments for commercial and non-profit organizations, it would take a miracle to rebuild the complex. Meanwhile, our members were dispersed in many cities in the nation, and their personal property destroyed by the flood also. The ACF, New Orleans Chapter, as we knew it, was no longer in existence. Unbelievable, yet true!

The first miracle was the banding together of five families that caught the vision of Ezra and Nehemiah, believing that tabernacle of the Lord, and the 'wall of Jerusalem' (i.e., the ACF Center) must be rebuilt. Propelled by the yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy that accompanied the miraculous acquisition of the ACF Community Center in year 2002, the 'Ezras', the 'Nehemiahs', the Zerubbabels', the 'Remnant' (Haggai 1:14), the 'War Cabinet', the First Responders, and the Laborers in the Lord's vineyard cried, fasted, and prayed. They worked hard and made personal sacrifices and regular financial contributions toward the reconstruction effort. They pursued every lead, and every opportunity to access help. Almost as quickly, in the month of October, 2005, the Lord began to show them favor.

The Lord provided a group of men from out-of-state to gut the buildings for $3,000.00, a job previously estimated to cost $17,000.00. Through contact with a local Pastor, the ACF, New Orleans Chapter President became active in an organization called the Pastors Resource Compassion (PRC) that later became instrumental to completing some of the building repairs at no cost. Brethren from New Jersey and North Carolina volunteered their time, talents, and treasures to ensure the reconstruction efforts were successful.

Surprisingly, the insurance company that wrote our hazard insurance policy paid an unanticipated amount that enabled the completion of some on-going repairs, even though the damage due to wind appeared minimal in comparison to the flood damage. Additionally, we applied for the Bush-Clinton Katrina Grant meant for distribution to faith-based organizations in the Gulf States impacted by the hurricane. We hope, by God's grace, to receive sufficient amounts of money from the grant for the completion of project "Ezra and Nehemiah".

Faith that is not tried cannot be trusted

Our walk has definitely been by faith, considering the odds and the fact that the membership is currently less than 10% of the original strength. We have faithfully conducted a Sunday-nightly 2-hour teleconference fellowship and prayer sessions since November of 2005. We have also started a once-a-month-general fellowship on site at the ACF Community Center since April, 2006. Throughout this time of dispersion, every effort was made to stay connected with our members, and prayer offered at every opportunity, that God would help them as they struggle to put their lives back together again.

Appreciation

My sincere thanks go to all of you that have enquired about the 'broken wall' in our 'Jerusalem', and have supported our reconstruction effort. I thank all ACF members, and the leadership of Chapters, Regions, and the National Board for their assistance in meeting our needs. May God bless you abundantly for your love and generosity. Please pray for the rebuilding of the Body of Christ in the New Orleans Chapter.

I would like to conclude this testimony of God's uncommon favor upon the ACF, New Orleans Chapter with James 1:2, and Rom. 8:28-39. GOD IS GOOD, ALL THE TIME.

Yours in His service,

Bro. Cliff Obih, President, ACF New Orleans Chapter ⌘

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