

## GENERAL PLAN OF THE WORK OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN HAITI

INTRODUCTION

The Methodist Church in Haiti exercises a varied ministry in five distinct areas of the country in the Departments of the West, the North, the Southwest and the Valley of the Grand 'Anse. She endeavors to meet the different needs of the rural as well as the urban population, well implanted in both environments and often bridging the two.

The Church is organized in the form of a "circuit" which generally means a church in the main town of the area and a network of "stations" in the countryside. At the head of each of these circuits there is a Superintendent who is helped by local preachers, committees and others and is responsible for assuring the smooth running of this team.

The various circuits form the District of the Methodist Church in Haiti, directed by a Chairman who is generally designated by the Annual Synod of the Church. The choice for Chairman is finally submitted for the approval of the General Assembly of the Methodist Conference of the Caribbean and the Americas to which the Methodist Church in Haiti is affiliated.

The outreach of the activities of the Methodist Church in Haiti is very wide. Following the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ who said: "I came not to be served but to serve," she contributes to the limit of her resources to find a solution to the diverse problems of the Haitian community, cooperating totally and loyally with the different departments of the Haitian government and other organizations working for the well-being of our people.

She is thus engaged in a constant effort of evangelization, making known to men the reality of God's love. But this Good News, this Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is likewise declared in practical forms such as:

1. The vast educational programme which is being developed in rural areas across the country.
2. The medical work carried out by clinics and dispensaries.
3. The big rehabilitation and community development projects which create the conditions necessary for a new way of life for our brothers in the underdeveloped parts of the country.

The Methodist Church was the first Protestant Mission to establish itself in Haiti. It was in 1817 on the invitation of President Alexandre Petion that the first Methodist missionaries arrived in Haiti. From that time the Methodist Missionary Society in England has constantly maintained this work by sending missionaries as well as important financial aid.

It is necessary only to quote the names of Mark Bird and Ormonde McConnell who each have made a major contribution to the advancement of our people. It was no doubt in recognition of his contribution that the Rev. McConnell was decorated with the Order of National Honour and Merit and that the Methodist Church has been recognized as a Service for the Public Well-Being.

Until 1967 the Methodist Church in Haiti was part of the Jamaica District, affiliated with the British Methodist Conference. Since then the Methodist Churches in the Caribbean and the Americas have received their autonomy and have formed their own Conference, sustained nevertheless by the British Methodist Church. On that occasion the Church in Haiti was elevated to the status of District and is directly affiliated with the new Conference. Since last year the Rev. Alain Rocourt has been Chairman of the Haiti District, the first Haitian to fill this position.

It was time, after more than a century and a half of activity in the country, that the Methodist Church arrived at this position in the midst of world Methodism. This development will enable her to pursue more vigorously the task of spiritual, moral and material advancement to which she has consecrated herself for the benefit of the Haitian community.

#### THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE WORK OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

To work for the advancement of the Haitian individual is one of the major concerns of the Methodist Church, a normal consequence of her theological conceptions. Here are a few examples:

1. All men are, without distinction, children of God who loves them and wants them to develop to the full the means for happiness which He has made available for them in His Universe.
2. All men need to be saved; all men can be saved completely.
3. The Christian is saved to serve; he is the "leaven that leavens the whole community."
4. The kingdom of God is not an "other worldly" reality but an actual and present possibility. It is established wherever God's will is done. There is not an impenetrable barrier between life here and now and life after death. These are but distinct stages of the same life.
5. The will of God for His children is that they realize the significance of their common sonship and that oppression, injustice and exploitation of man by man be eliminated from mankind.

#### SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

In the realm of social action the Methodist Church has played and still plays an important role, strongly supporting the efforts of the Government. It has even been avant-garde with some of its generous and bold initiatives.

##### Education

In 1940, when Creole and our working classes were ignored and even despised by the leading classes, the Methodist Church, believing that our masses would always be handicapped if they did not break out of the constrictions of illiteracy and with the help of Haitian and foreign experts,

developed a speedy and phonetic method of writing Creole (known as the "Laubach Method" after the internationally renowned missionary who helped to create it). The Church also gave a helping hand in literacy campaigns to convince the general public of the possibility of making our masses literate. Teaching in Creole is now recognized by the Department of National Education.

The Church has also tried to give a sound education to the children and the young people of our towns and countryside by founding two important Colleges, Nouveau College Bird in Port-au-Prince and College Modele in Cap Haitien. Modern teaching methods are employed, and children are treated as creative beings who play a part in discovering the world. The continued success of these two schools and the solid and well-balanced formation which children receive there have given them a place of honour in the community. Ten new important, well-organized rural schools and several other less important ones have been created in the last six years.

To satisfy the need for qualified rural teachers, the Church recruits people from the rural areas. They attend a three-year training course at the Protestant Rural Teaching Centre at Freres in the suburb of Petionville. At present, the Methodist Church is the only Protestant Mission to devote itself to a rural teachers' training college. Next year seven new rural schools in the areas of the Grand 'Anse, Petit-Goave, the North, and La Gonave (costing approximately \$55,000) will be built.

#### Medical Work

A Dental and Medical Clinic at La Salina in Port-au-Prince has a fully qualified medical staff to dispense curative medicine and attempt to teach preventive medicine to the poor population of the region. Not far from Cap Haitien in the heart of the countryside at Toyan and Limbe, two rural dispensaries care for the surrounding population.

In the Grand 'Anse two rural dispensaries, which work as part of the Rural Rehabilitation Project, have an enormous importance in the life of rural communities within a radius of more than 50 kilometres, and they receive annually up to 42,000 cases.

In the region of Petit Goave a mobile clinic regularly brings help to the most distant corners of the countryside. On the Island of La Gonave, as part of another rehabilitation project, a dispensary attracts sick people from numerous surrounding communities. The Church works with the Department of Public Health on these projects.

Sometimes the Church has been able to implement a widespread medical programme quickly, putting into action considerable resources. Thus last year, with the help of three medical teams from the United Methodist Church in the United States, we were able to mount an anti-tetanus, anti-typhoid and anti-whooping cough vaccination campaign in the Grand 'Anse from which 45,000 adults and children benefited.

In the same area the Church is organizing a training course for country midwives, supplying them with a medical kit which will enable them to operate more efficiently in the heart of the countryside where appeal is constantly made for their services.

Rural Development

For many years the main thrust of the Church's work has been in the rural sector. Since agriculture constitutes the livelihood of the great majority of our people, the Church has tried to attack the problems of rural life. By helping to resolve these problems, the conditions of life for our brothers in the countryside become less hard and more worthy of their status as children of God.

We ought to say that since the Methodist Church is deeply rooted in the area and enjoys the confidence of our people, it is well placed to mount such a programme in view of the accumulated experience of its pastors, evangelists, etc.

LAY TRAINING - CHURCH GROWTH

The first part of this paper was written by Pastor Alain Rocourt, Superintendent of the Methodist Church of Haiti. Because it was written for UMCOR, it does not deal with its evangelistic outreach, training of lay speakers, Scripture distribution, etc.

The Church has as its first priority the development of a lay leadership training centre in Port-au-Prince, and financial help is needed for this and many other projects.

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