

AFRIGO

Encouraging the Church in world mission

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From Internet Shy to
Internet Savvy

Restoring the Financial
Bottom Line

Digital Technology and Ministry
in the face of COVID-10



**TECHNOLOGY AND
MISSIONS DURING
COVID-19**

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COVID CLOSES THE DOOR TECHNOLOGY OPENS THE WINDOW

In the New Testament, Paul wrote many letters to communicate his messages. He was leveraging the technology he had at the time to disseminate the message of Jesus Christ. In fact, during his time of incarceration he became especially effective in using this method. He recognised that though he was literally chained, the Gospel was not in any way chained. Hence, he was open and committed to proclaiming the gospel using what was available to him (2 Tim. 2:9).

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, many of us got a taste of what Paul must have felt under house arrest. Just as Paul utilised the available technology to continue his ministry, so we, having even more technology at our disposal, should utilise it.

Ministry during COVID

Technology is a gift from God that His church needs to embrace and maximise for the work of ministry. God's plan to bring many more people into fellowship with Himself (Jn. 10:16) remains unchanged. It is still His plan to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10). With doors closed to reaching other people due to the COVID-19 restrictions, technology has become the open window to engage the lost with the gospel.

Many gospel workers report having more opportunities to engage their neighbours through social media platforms

such as WhatsApp. Many Muslim brothers and sisters who are nervous about COVID-19 are being reached by gospel workers and, through such interactions, the gospel is proclaimed. Other missionaries report more opportunities to engage with the lost than they had before COVID. A missionary in Madagascar wrote:

“People are searching for a spiritual power that they can cling to; they are searching for God. There is a sense of spiritual hunger sweeping across my country. People feel so desperate that they are searching for something bigger.”¹

As people search for something bigger, missionaries have been able to leverage technology to engage many with the Gospel. Many have come to know the love of God more deeply in this season as a result. Jason Mandryk reports: “In the UK, where weekly church attendance is well under 10%, it is being reported that 25% of adults have watched or listened to a religious service since CoVid-19 [SIC] lockdowns.”²

A network reaching out to Chinese people in Johannesburg has seen the COVID pandemic as an opportunity to engage others in new ways. They have embraced WeChat and WhatsApp to share the gospel. A Chinese missionary reaching the Chinese in South Africa said, “The ongoing outbreak is an opportunity to keep sharing the gospel as more people search for peace.”³

In this issue of AfriGO, you will read many examples of how technology has opened the window of missions when COVID shut the door. Even the process of mobilising new workers into the mission field cannot be stopped by a virus, because technology has provided new ways to recruit, train and send (p. 4-5). Apostle Vincent Anane Denteh in Ghana will show how the church is not a newcomer to adopting new technologies (p. 8) and Jean Seri will demonstrate how radio — one of the oldest pairings of technology and mission — is more vital than ever during COVID.

If this time of COVID has taught us anything, it is that we need to make the most of every opportunity God gives us (Eph. 5:16). Like the Sons of Issachar, we need to know the times (1 Chron. 12:32) and adapt our ministries and our strategies to align with these times. Technology is a great blessing and a gift that the church of Christ needs to leverage on and engage the lost. As we wait for medical breakthroughs to deal with COVID, let us harness technology to engage the lost with the Gospel of Christ.

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¹ <https://eu.aimint.org/whats-happening-in-madagascar/>

² <https://covid-19.operationworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Global-Transmission-Global-Mission.pdf>

³ https://world.wng.org/2020/03/evangelism_over_isolation

THE PATHWAY TO MISSIONS

GO

Even during the global pandemic, people want to go out and serve God in missions. Churches and missions agencies are still looking for missionaries to train up and to send. However, with travel severely restricted, how has the process gone forward? Across Africa, mobilisers

have grabbed hold of technology to bridge the gap, often using methods that were already available but underutilised.

The pathway toward service has been well-trodden already, but creative followers of Christ are adapting it for modern times.

1

MOBILISATION

Mobilisers, the people who inspire others to GO, have been busy this year! Courses such as Kairos, Perspectives and others have gone online all over Africa. The Holy Spirit is at work and missions agencies report that ever increasing numbers of youth have heard their call to reach the nations.

Daniel Salamu, director of SIM's West Africa Missions Office, says: "It is amazing to know that during the pandemic, the West Africa Missions Office recorded an all-time high in the number of workers accepted to serve. I can confidently say that 98 per cent of the mobilisation was all done virtually."

2

ENGAGEMENT

Once a would-be missionary hears the call to serve, it is time to involve others. The wise counsel of church leaders and mentors can lead to the search for a missions organisation. This is informal at first. To see a list of key questions to ask a mission organisation, visit <https://bit.ly/30Kp7MV>

"Through friendships with churches and organisations in our region, we get referrals of those who would like to serve. We make the first contact through email, WhatsApp or Facebook. We introduce ourselves and our mission agency — what we do, how we do it and what they can do to be part of it. When we agree they can move to the next step, we connect with them through email with our first letters."
- Daniel Salamu, WAMO Director

3

APPLICATION AND CANDIDACY

We no longer have to wait at the post box for application documents or reference letters. Email, now widely in use, can speed the process. Additionally, churches or missions organisations can easily share ministry opportunities online.

4

SELECTION

This step involves interviews, which are often not possible in-person. Daniel Salamu of WAMO has created a national workgroup in each of the 16 countries recruited from. Candidates were previously interviewed in person by those groups, but during 2020 they were able to meet more than 20 candidates through Zoom. For the first time, they also invited the sending church of one candidate to join the virtual interviews. This gave the church an opportunity to participate and know how to better support the candidate going forward.

Meeting in person is preferable, as it is easier to make a heart connection and to evaluate more accurately. However, where meeting is not possible, God has given us a way to make it possible.

5

ACCEPTANCE AND TRAINING



Appointees, or those who are accepted as missionaries, must be trained before being sent. Topics such as “How to build a support team,” “Working cross-culturally,” or additional Bible or professional training are vital to future success. The Africa Inland Mission (AIM) South Africa Office recently held their FUEL training online for people across Africa, and WAMO held their first event for 30 appointees in 2020.

Let's Go is an interactive missions training resource designed to be done with a missionary appointee and a mentor, typically a seasoned missionary. The pair can meet by any video or audio platform to discuss the many topics and practical activities in the curriculum. In this way, a missionary appointee can learn and reflect on the topics right at home, while waiting to be sent to the field. PDF version: bit.ly/LetsGOpdf
Videos: [bit.ly/ LetsGoVideos](https://bit.ly/LetsGoVideos)

6

RESOURCE AND RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY



It is always a challenge for new missionaries to gather the prayer and financial support team who will go with them in spirit to the field. How does one do this when people are not able or allowed to meet? Surely the God who has called is also the God who provides.

“I found that sharing my short-term missions experiences or prayers for Unreached People Groups via WhatsApp was the best approach to find potential partners. It’s a popular platform and I continue to share my newsletters on the church WhatsApp group.” - Neo Moeti, missionary from Lesotho in Kenya

Online banking was present before the pandemic but has become fast-tracked during lockdown. Kenya’s M-Changa is one example of an online and mobile platform that can connect donors with missionaries. Many African countries are developing secure mobile banking services that may be harnessed for fundraising remotely.

10

MEMBER CARE AND SUSTAINABILITY



About 42 per cent of missionaries leave the field after their first term. Member care is important! It is the shared responsibility of the sending office, receiving office, sending church and the missionary.

At SIM, International Director Joshua Bogunjoko began holding weekly Zoom meetings to share spiritual encouragement and provide a forum for questions, plus written weekly devotionals in several languages, to encourage workers around the world during COVID.

In areas where overseeing pastors or mission leaders cannot travel to visit, WhatsApp and online chats help new missionaries to talk about their challenges, request prayer, and receive wise counsel. While in some places missionaries have felt very isolated, the ability to interact with leaders using technology has made a difference.

9

ARRIVAL AND INTEGRATION



There is no digital substitute for integrating in a new place; it must be done in person. Culture shock is a very real response to a new environment, but it is now much easier to receive help from afar. New missionaries can even get language coaching over phone or internet.

8

COMMISSIONING



Time to send! Few times are more poignant to a missionary, their church, and a sending organisation than the commissioning service. Final goodbyes and arrangements are made. Phone calls to family and friends may have to take the place of last embraces in these days.

7

PREPARATION FOR DEPARTURE



What does my ministry location look like? What should I bring? Who are my colleagues? Communication with those at your destination is vital for preparation, and it is now possible to view photos and do video chats to form relationships even before arriving. In some places, the visa application process is now online and streamlined, as well as booking travel, vaccinations and other logistics.

FROM INTERNET SHY TO INTERNET SAVVY

GETTING YOUR MINISTRY INTO THE DIGITAL SPACE

Not long ago, the AfriGO team filmed an interview with a young missionary whom we wanted to feature on our Facebook page. The setting was pleasant, and he had a compelling story to share. However, the sound quality was poor. Passing cars and blowing wind created a noisy background. This problem could have been solved by filming indoors in a well-lit room or in an area sheltered from the wind, and by using a simple microphone to record his speech. But we had not planned ahead. In the end, we added subtitles to the video so we could use it. We missed an opportunity to create a video which could be widely shared and enjoyed.

This is the experience of many people who are new to digital media, whether you are a communications professional or a non-professional who finds yourself needing to use digital platforms. You may have an idea of what you want to achieve, but you lack the experience, tools or foresight to produce the finished product you hope for. You are not alone. The COVID pandemic has quickly forced many to use digital tools and communicate in



online environments they have never used before. Consider some principles that will assist you.

PURPOSE

First, identify your purpose clearly. What do you want to achieve? Who is your audience? What do you want them to do after hearing your message?

Once you know your goal, choose how to reach it. Will you need a website

SMART GOALS ARE:

- **Specific:** the goal is clear, specific.
- **Measurable:** there are criteria to measure its progress and success.
- **Attainable:** you have the materials, resources and energy to achieve it.
- **Relevant:** the goal matters; it matches your purpose.
- **Timely:** the goal is timebound; it includes tasks with start and finish dates.

or social media? Which platform? Each channel and platform has its own pros and cons. A primary way to decide

RESOURCES

Where can you find help to become more professional in using media technology for ministry? Several Christian groups have created training.

Digital Training Academy:

<https://digitalacademy.cru.org/>

This training, originally created for the ministry's staff, has been made available for free to the rest of us.

Watch videos or read tips on a wide range of digital media topics.

Magazine Training International:
www.magazinetraining.com

MTI is dedicated to helping small Christian publishers thrive. Their webinars and resources are often free or low-cost,

and can help improve your digital design and editing skills.

Mission Media University:

www.missionmedia.org/courses/

MMU equips missionaries to be better communicators, disciple-makers and church planters as they develop skills in using media, story and innovative technology in their mission. Discounts are available for those from the Majority World.

Training the Trainers Using Technology during COVID:

<http://youtu.be/1bGgDv8Tfnc>

This hour-long video from Johannesburg Bible College is an introduction to using

media technology as a teacher or trainer. It takes into consideration some of the realities of using technology in Africa.

Strategic Storytelling:

<https://bit.ly/3c3kovb>

Take this free short course from Kingdom Training to help you engage your audience better.

A pastor uses social media:

<http://bit.ly/3uPSyek>

Do you want to reach others with the Gospel through social media? One pastor tells his story of doing it and gives advice on how to use your skills in digital space.

which platform to use is to consider which one your audience uses. To reach specific people, go where they are in the digital world.

Finally, do you communicate a clear action step for your audience that aligns with your stated purpose? Does your content make people want to do something or will they just move on?

PROFESSIONALISM

The quality of our content shows that we respect our audiences, we are serious people, we have a goal and we will work hard to achieve it. It demonstrates our love for God, who tells us: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” (Col. 3:23). Your audience has lots of content coming into their phones, and poor-quality content is less likely to be viewed, let alone inspire a response.

Quality does not mean you need top-of-the-line tools. It does mean you have to do your best and research ways to maximize the equipment you have. You may have the best equipment in the world, but if you don’t plan and test first, the result will be mediocre. Keep in mind lighting, steadiness of camera and audio quality. Remember to do a test and review it before doing your big video.

Use tools such as Grammarly.com to check format and spelling. Always



ask others to proofread your text. Be especially careful before posting anything sensitive or critical of others online. Get permissions before writing about ministry in dangerous places. Remember, once it goes online, it can be forwarded by others. What you say must also be true; it can be tempting to give a good report even when the ministry is not going well, but we are people of truth.

CONSISTENCY

Once you decide which platforms to use, be consistent. It may be a good idea to create a month’s worth of content before starting, then stay ahead so if you have a busy period in your life, the platform will not go hungry. You will lose your audience if you do not update regularly. Start only what you can maintain. It is better to have no platform than an outdated or abandoned one. Interact

consistently with your audience. Social media is a two-way conversation. You are opening yourself to comments, both good and bad, that can be shared and reposted. Always answer questions that arise, thank people for their participation, and immediately delete anything that is inaccurate, vulgar or inflammatory.

YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

It is tempting to use free services to post content, and that is often perfectly appropriate. However, nothing is truly free. Free trials and websites must collect their money somehow, whether through advertising or giving your personal information to third parties. Be wise and make informed decisions about what you are giving up in order to receive “free” services. Always read the privacy standards of a social media platform before deciding to use it.

Some web hosting sites cost very little and provide a much better standard. Network with others to find out what they use and what their experience has been. Do your research.

Investing in low-cost equipment like a lapel microphone or video editing software is another way to up your game. Perhaps rent space at a local radio station to record your audio. Paying for the services of a tech-savvy young person may also be a big help.

Never before in the history of the world have God’s people had the ability to reach so many so quickly. Let’s use these opportunities wisely.



WHAT IS A BLOG?

A blog is a series of articles, often with an informal or conversational tone, which appear in order of what is newest. It is usually only one long page and is updated frequently. By contrast, a full website has static content and many pages. Websites may have blogs in them.

There are many options for making your own free website and blog. You will have to pay for a domain name and

hosting if you want the site’s name to be yours, i.e. [www.\[ANameYouChoose\].org](http://www.[ANameYouChoose].org). Visit www.websitesetup.org to learn about that. On a free site, your site name may be something like [www.\[ANameYouChoose\].wordpress.com](http://www.[ANameYouChoose].wordpress.com).

How to start a Christian blog:

<https://bit.ly/3kHogG3>

Bloggers for the Kingdom:

<https://bit.ly/3edJha3>

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

BY VINCENT ANANE DENTEH

Digital technology has introduced new terms such as digital age, digital culture, digital space, digital media, and digital community, resulting in a new global order known as the 'digital world.' Those born in 1985 and on are called "digital natives," while those born before the digital era and making effort to stay abreast of it are "digital immigrants." What are churches and mission agencies to do with the new world of digital natives? Do we, as Christians, ignore and avoid it or use and engage it?

Digital technology such as cell phones, digital cameras, video projectors, satellite systems, radio, the internet, and computers have not only accelerated communication; they have also recast our cultural values and societal norms in terms of how we relate to each other, how we worship in the church and how we do missions.

Digital technology enhances collaboration and innovation in missions, and the impact is obvious during the present pandemic. Responding to COVID-19 lockdowns, churches have put their programmes on TV, radio, internet, and mobile phones, demonstrating the importance of digital technology in Christian ministry.

But Christians need to thoroughly understand the technological trends that are driving the developments around the world.

The Church's Engagement with Digital Technology

Adopting paradigm shifts driven by new technology is not new for the church. In the medieval world, the church adopted Johannes Gutenberg's cutting-edge technology: the printing press. This replaced books that were hand-written or labouriously printed from engraved wooden blocks. Today, we are shifting from print to electronic devices. Are we to resist or to reclaim this development as past Christians did the printed Bibles?

Crucially, today's digital technology is easily accessible to many people. The gospel can be communicated in real time anywhere in the world using digital technology. The onus lies on the church to harness the digital space as a new ministry environment.

Digital technology has become indispensable in the world and, for that matter, is now a strategic medium through which the church can reach all nations and all peoples. Digital technology is closing the gap between the church and unreached people groups. The challenge is no longer to identify the location of people but rather, to identify the most relevant digital technology to use at a given time. The church must contextualise the digital world at its disposal to enhance its ministry activities.

Biblical Perspective on Technology

Some Christians ask whether the Bible endorses the use of technology in ministry; for example, reading the Bible from electronic devices. To address this, Christians need to grasp thoroughly the meaning of technology and examine it through the lens of Scripture.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary states that technology is the "application of knowledge to the practical aims of human life and includes the use of materials, tools, techniques, and resources of power to make life easier or ... more productive." Is this concept alien to the Bible? Should we reject technology as evil or harness it as part of God's provision for humankind? From carpentry tools that Jesus would have used in his workshop to chariot technology (Ps. 20:7) and the many tools used by great craftsmen such as Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex. 31:3-6), using our knowledge to create tools and manipulate them has been with us since Cain fashioned the first hoe to till the ground.

What is important is that our sovereign God gives His people

knowledge not only for personal use, but to serve the purpose of God.

So far, we see that digital technology is vital for ministry but the church must be proactive and responsible in conducting digital space ministry. Forming new and relevant missiological models and approaches is key to effective digital ministry.

The church should study both digital technology and the culture of the digital community, in order to relevantly fashion the gospel message in an appealing manner. Humans should shape their tools for their use, but digital technology is so pervasive it appears to be shaping us. Shall it rule us, or shall we rule it? If the church fails to dominate the digital space, it risks being overwhelmed by the ungodly acts of some people. When the church proactively develops a missiological framework for digital technology, the abuses associated with it can be addressed.

Conclusion

Every Christian with access to digital technology or an electronic device should bear witness to the gospel in their digital community. There is no need to hesitate; the more we delay, the more souls will die without Christ.

We ought to see ourselves as labourers in the Lord's vineyard, called to fulfil God's mission mandate in our lifetime. Finally, the pace of adapting digital technologies has increased because of COVID-19, and approaches to ministry will never remain the same, even after the pandemic.

Apostle Vincent Anane Denteh serves as the Area Head of the Church of Pentecost for Sefwi Bekwai, Ghana. His background is in journalism, theology, and missions. He previously served as a missionary from Ghana to Ukraine and also Madagascar. Apostle Denteh is the author of ten books and many articles.

Article re-printed courtesy of Voice of Missions magazine: www.gemagh.org/vom/

CALLED: JEAN SERI

AS TOLD TO MERCY KAMBURA

I have always had a knack for music and electronics. In 1983, I returned to Côte d'Ivoire from Guinea, where I had been studying. I joined the UEESO-CI (Union des Eglises Evangéliques Service et Œuvre) in the commune of Adjamé in Côte d'Ivoire. I was the regional secretary of the UEESO youth of Abidjan. In the church, I was part of the team responsible for setting up the music group's equipment and the control board. This job was very fulfilling for me.

When the mission, SIM, talked about the FM radio project, I was one of the first to sign up. I joined Fréquence Vie in 1994 as a control board trainee, and once I got a taste of the microphone and programme production, I was unstoppable.

Since 2018, I have served as director of SIM Côte d'Ivoire and president of the board of the Christian Radio Fréquence Vie.

I didn't know just how much impact we were having on radio until Abidjan's civil rebellion in 2002. One morning, I woke up and turned on my radio, eager to hear what was going on. I tried the major international stations such as the BBC, but none were broadcasting, not even the national radio.

I decided to start a broadcast on our radio and contacted some of our listeners who were frequent callers. There was lots of gunfire; we prayed for protection over the radio live broadcast. The Ivorian army heard us and came towards the station – our radio is near the army barracks. The military pushed back, and the rebels couldn't take over Abidjan.

A few weeks later, one of the rebels called in on the radio and said, "It was because of you that we couldn't take Abidjan. Next time, we'll start with your radio."



Jean Seri, president of the board of FM Radio Fréquence Vie in Côte d'Ivoire. Broadcasts during the pandemic have been the only point of human contact for many in times of lockdown.

We replied, "We will pray for you, that you may not destroy that which you haven't created."

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, many churches closed. People couldn't go to church. We took this opportunity to invite preachers on the radio every Sunday. We also encouraged people to phone in and share about their experiences and how they were coping. We were the only point of human contact for many during lockdown.

Radio is a tool that allows us to enter remote areas where evangelists cannot yet go. We are intimately involved in personal lives and we talk to thousands of people without meeting them.

I learned through COVID-19 that the enemy wants to prevent us from fulfilling the Great Commission, from announcing the Good News and making disciples. However, during confinement, radio and online programmes provided the opportunity for some people to discover God and others to deepen their relationship with God.

COVID-19 has had little negative effect on my ministry; on the contrary, it has helped strengthen communication through online interaction and has brought people closer to care better for one another.

Radio and mass media are phenomenal means to reach those who would otherwise not hear the Gospel or meet a Christian. It also feeds Christians' minds with "whatever is true, pure, admirable, and excellent" (Phillipians 4:8), in contrast to secular philosophies. I encourage Christians to be involved in media as a powerful means to convey God's truth to transform hardened hearts. One must always be sure to remain humble before God and constantly pursue God's glory.

My greatest satisfaction is knowing God has used someone as insignificant as me to win His creation, that people have been transformed by listening to God's Word through the radio waves.

Many churches have started their own radio stations recently, which is terrific, as long as the message of the cross is preached. It's good to be careful, though, that the radio message doesn't become a promotion of the host or producer who is usurping God's place. Without God, nothing is possible. God must be given His rightful place.

PLEASE PRAY:

- That God will bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- That we carry out our task with love, returning the glory to Almighty God.
- That churches will invest in evangelical radio ministry in Côte d'Ivoire.
- That God will provide the financial and material means for Christian radio ministry to cover all Côte d'Ivoire through Radio Fréquence Vie.

GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILISING CHURCH

SEND AFRICA NETWORK SUMMIT

The Send Africa Network (SAN) hosted its first summit on February 24-25. The virtual event drew attendees globally and highlighted the history of African missions, as well as the missions potential of Africa's 630 million Christians and the estimated 140 million people of African descent in the diaspora.

SAN was founded by seasoned missions mobilisers, including

Ebenezer Aryee, Sam Ngugi, Daniel Appiah, Yaw Perbi and Alan Webster. SAN aims to catalyze



effective collaboration among mission movements in Africa and in the diaspora, encouraging 'total mobilisation' of the whole church. The event included discussions about the birth of an African Centre for Mission Mobilisation and Research in Ghana.

<https://sendafricanetwork.org/summit-2021/>

info@sendafricanetwork.org

TUNISIA'S NEW CHRISTIAN TV TALK SHOW

A new talk show, Standard Talk, was launched in early 2021 by Tunisia's first Christian television production team, Perpetua. Standard Talk covers a range of topics, from how to know God to biblical guidance for family life.

The show joins the Arabic lineup of programmes aired across North Africa by Christian broadcaster SAT-7. International Director for SAT-7 Arabic Channels, George Makeen, says: "It is exciting to see a small but active Tunisian Church of believers from non-Christian backgrounds, eager to go on screen and communicate with their society. And they come with the passion to produce programmes in different genres and to build capacity for the future. They are ambitious and optimistic!"

<https://bit.ly/30Nud1l>

VIRTUAL SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIP

In December 2020, AIM partnered with E3 Canada to facilitate a six-day, virtual short-term missions trip. When the world shut down, this was an innovative way for people to participate in the global work of the gospel.

Each day, participants from around the world joined a Zoom for 90 minutes. They received training in outreach and church planting tools, interacted with missionaries serving among refugees and immigrants in Belgium and Malta, and prayed. Over the course of the week, 120 people were trained, challenged and encouraged.

The highlight for many was interacting with Kevin and Amos, missionaries reaching unreached African people groups living in and passing through Europe. They shared about the unique challenges and opportunities to church plant among these vulnerable groups. Team members



were also encouraged to use the tools they gained on the trip to participate in cross-cultural outreach with displaced people in their own area.

This new format for engaging people interested in missions but unable to travel opens many opportunities for training, equipping and resourcing fledgling cross-cultural workers. AIM hopes to continue to use virtual short-term mission trips to bring missions training and awareness across the globe.

MALAWI EVANGELICAL MISSION ASSOCIATION FOUNDED

The Malawi Evangelical Mission Association (MEMA) was born on 4 February 2021. Churches and 11 Malawian missions sending organisations have come together to collaborate in mobilisation, missionary training, sending, support and care, and cross-cultural church planting. The African Mission Association (AfMA) and Ghana Evangelical Mission Association (GEMA) have pledged their support.

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RESTORING THE FINANCIAL BOTTOM LINE

BY MERCY KAMBURA

You may have heard it said that if you want to hide something from an African, put it in a book. That proved to be true for Tony and Julia Mburu, not for lack of readers, but for lack of good books, a shortage they set out to change.

Biographies were a huge motivation for Tony and Julia Mburu, mobilisers with the Kenyan organisation Mission Campaign Network (MCN), during discipleship training that opened their eyes to God's heart for saving the nations and their role in it. Like hungry caterpillars, they devoured books such as *The End of the Spear*, *For this Cross, I Will Kill You*, and biographies of Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward and other brave missionaries.

These biographies, focused on taking the true gospel to others, righted the balance amid the myriad of motivational and prosperity-centred self-help books available. The books influenced them to become mission mobilisers, as the inspirational stories fanned the mission embers already glowing in their hearts.

From the outset of their ministry, they drew up lists of the best books they found, encouraging others to read them. Many were dismayed and frustrated, however, by lack of access to these books. The couple therefore decided to source books for their friends, colleagues, and the people they were ministering to.

In 2013, they began selling books, soon discovering that selling to readers



scattered around a country was not easy. As newlyweds setting out on life together, they did not have cash to rent premises, and they did not know a book supplier. Their venture fizzled like a fire in a storm, the ashes of their dream remaining untouched until 2020.

After they moved to Mombasa in 2017, a friend introduced them to a ministry supplying Christian books to booksellers and organisations in Kenya.

"The desire to get involved in bookselling was there, but we hadn't fully grasped the logistics," they said.

In early 2020, the coronavirus pandemic closed down the country for several weeks, causing job losses and pay cuts. This greatly affected the Mburus, who raise support from individuals. Most of them soon withdrew their financial contribution, while others significantly reduced theirs. In no time, 40% of their financial support had trickled away. They needed a fast solution, and the book idea was the first to come to mind.

People, now confined to their homes, had switched to shopping online, removing the previous obstacles of premises and distance. Obtaining stock from a book supplier, they founded Bottomline Books in July 2020, with the goal of providing quality

Christian books focused on discipleship and mission.

The name "bottomline" is derived from the Kairos course's training on bottom-line blessings, teaching that we are blessed to be a blessing – to spread the love of Christ. Avoiding motivational and self-help books, Tony and Julia carefully select sound discipleship and missional books, biographies and biblical books for children.

Anthony promptly created a Facebook page and invited his friends to follow. His WhatsApp group has 196 participants. He uses the groups to market books, advertise new stock, and allow members to reserve books for purchase.

Tony takes photos of book covers to post with prices on WhatsApp and Facebook, where customers can order. Once payment has been made, the books are sent to a central pick up point in various towns to be collected in person or delivered for a fee.

"Our goal is to build rich libraries in people's homes, and we're glad that we're able to do that while augmenting our income," he says.

Proceeds from book sales are used for MCN team ministry in Mombasa, to support other missionaries and for their own family needs.

PLEASE PRAY:

- For perseverance and resourcefulness for many missionaries facing the loss of financial support during the pandemic.
- For new support channels to open for missionaries, ministries and churches so they may carry forward all God has called them to do.
- For readers to be transformed by the books newly available through Bottomline Books.



PEOPLE GROUPS:

NORTH AFRICAN ARABS

Africa has been home to Arab people since the A.D. 600s. Many live in the Maghreb region of western North Africa, which includes the countries of Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. These countries also have significant populations of Berber, or Imazighen, people and in some ways the two cultures have blended over centuries of living alongside one another.

Maghreb Arabs speak various dialects of Arabic, Berber/Amazigh, and some Spanish and French. Although they have Arab ancestry, they also have African ancestry and identify with both cultures on this continent where they have lived for centuries.

The Maghreb region is predominantly Muslim, with very small populations of Jews and Christians. The Islam practiced here is not generally as conservative as in Saudi Arabia, and people range from being very devout and conservative to practicing a more nominal Islam, as well as Folk Islam.

In parts of North Africa, some people have begun to question or reject their Muslim upbringing, identifying instead as atheist or agnostic. Others are genuinely seeking for the truth, and many turn to the internet in their search for answers about God and faith. It is no exaggeration to say that many North African Arabs don't know anyone who can explain to them how to know Jesus Christ.

Some Christian ministries seeking to reach North African Arabs with the gospel of peace have set up websites and social media platforms to engage with those who are searching for information about the truth. Through this work, genuine seekers are able to learn more about the Bible and the Christian faith, and eventually connect with other Christians who live in their area of North Africa. These seekers have a chance to hear the gospel message, place their faith in Christ, and join a healthy North African church.

At a Glance

- Many parts of North Africa are fewer than one percent Christian.
- People in North Africa will likely face opposition from their family and community for becoming Christians.
- Although many have little or no access to a physical copy of the Bible, most own a smartphone and have some access to the Internet. Technology is a key way to reach them with the Gospel.

Pray

- Increase the spiritual hunger for truth among North Africans.
- Give wisdom and discernment to Christians who are using technology to reach them with the Gospel.
- Help the few local churches to be faithful and healthy.
- Help the believers to become bolder witnesses and not to give in to fear.



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