

Congregation of Christian Brothers

West Africa District

(GHANA, THE GAMBIA, LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE)

Wan Pot News



Monthly West Africa District News Publication

DECEMBER 2016



Liberia 1969



The Gambia 1988



Sierra Leone 1985



Ghana 2001

"Peace to the children, on this special day on which God became a child, above all those deprived of the joys of childhood because of hunger, wars or the selfishness of adults."

Pope Francis, Christmas Day 2016

**WEST AFRICAN DISTRICT
NEWSLETTER
“WAN POT”**

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Warmest Christmas greetings and richest blessing to all for the New Year.

Welcome to our December Wan Pot. We are happy to dedicate this entire edition to the recent West African District Annual Assembly, held at Kenema December 15th-21st. “*The Essence of being Brother within the West African District,*” was the theme set for this important assembly.

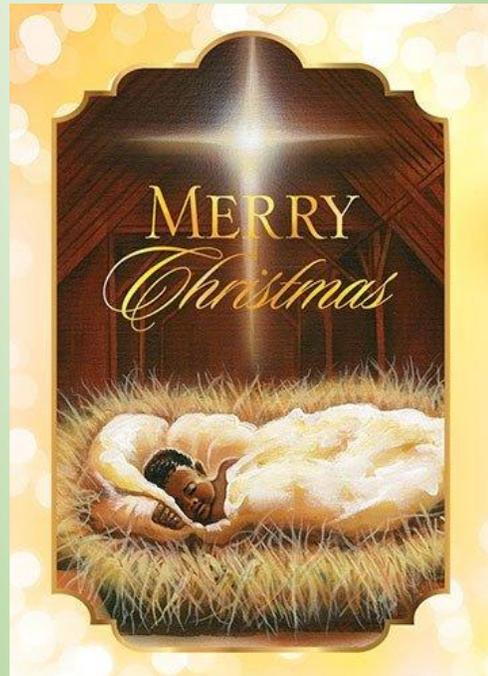
The first two days were devoted to our Chapter Call to Advocacy and related topics, and facilitated by Brs. Brian Bond and Kevin Mullen of Edmund Rice International in Geneva. We were privileged to have a number of representatives from our Edmund Rice Network (ERN) and our Edmund Rice Advocacy (ERA) Groups join us for the first two days of the Assembly.

The highlight of the gathering happened half-way through assembly, with the Renewal of Vow ceremony at Sunday Eucharist for the annually professed.

Several additional guest-presenters, including Congregation Leader, Br. Hugh O’Neill and John Casey, Mr. Emmanuel Tongai, (ERN), Br. Clement Sindasi, and Br. Dominic Sassi, took up the next two days, each followed by an opportunity for Brothers to have an open forum. Enjoy reading about this impressive assembly.

*Christmas Greetings and
New Year’s Blessings*

To all our Readers



*“He became what we are
That we might become
What He is.”*

Athanasius

The Essence of being Brother

General Annual Assembly

West African District (Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia, The Gambia)

National Pastoral Centre, Kenema

December 15-21, 2016



West African District Assembly: Christian Brothers, Edmund Rice Network and Edmund Rice Advocacy members join together for the WAD Annual Assembly. Presenters included Brs. Hugh O'Neill, John Casey, Brian Bond, Kevin Mullen, Dominic Sassi, Clement Sindazi and Mr. Emmanuel Tongai.

Day 1: Jubilant Brothers and representatives of the Edmund Rice Network and Edmund Rice Advocacy Groups gathered at the National Pastoral Centre in Kenema on the evening of the 15th December, 2016. The atmosphere was fraternal and electrifying. After super that evening, the Brothers, along with the Edmund Rice Network and Edmund Rice Advocacy Representatives, assembled in the assembly hall for few announcements and the evening was climaxed with social interaction.

Day 2: Day two commenced with a reflective and creative morning prayer, led by the Personal Growth Programme Team (PGP), setting the stage for the day's activities.

Opening Remarks of the Assembly Br. Noel Bradshaw, District Leader

In his opening remarks, Br. Noel Bradshaw began by posing a reflective question to the gathered Brothers, Network and Advocacy members: "Why are we here?" There could be numerous reasons, he said. Noel further digressed, but the most fundamental reason is to examine the essence of brotherhood in the West African District.



And next time around, he asked a rhetorical question: “Will the West Africa District survive?” In confidence and optimism, his response was – “Yes it will survive.” But for that to happen, the Brothers of the District remain the most crucial players in shaping the destiny of the District and re-writing its history. Disappointingly, he commented that different bombs have detonated within the District. “Do we understand the essence of Religious Life?” It took the frantic effort of a layman to let us understand that we are losing it. The outcome was a mixed success. We need to revisit the fundamentals of our District. Our downfalls can indeed effect our risings to new life, he further stated. If we understand the essence of who we are, we can make our District and our Congregation better. The District Leader further stated that he does not understand the reality of our situation because he is absolutely different from us – he is white and we are black - hence, he relies on us and to a great extent on Albert and Andrew, the other two black members of the leadership team that he directly works with, to understand the socio-cultural reality of our situation and how it affects our full comprehension of Religious Life. He remarked that perhaps some did not understand the essence of Religious Life before they joined it, or perhaps lost it along the way – they get what they want and take off the next minute.

He also spoke on the “I am surviving” response of most Brothers within the District each time they are asked about their spiritual development or wellbeing. In his own words, Noel stated that is just not good enough. He further digressed that the issue of spiritual nourishment should be critically looked at, if we were to collectively grow as a District. He urged the gathered Brothers to make an assembly shift before leaving Kenema, and that such a crucial decision has the propensity to better our District, but it has to come from us. We are not a multi-national corporation; we are called to be spiritual leaders.



BACK ROW: Brothers, Edmund Rice Network and Edmund Rice Advocacy members: (l-r) Emmanuel, Abu, Augustine, Priscila, Thomas, Musa, Steve, Br. Gomeh, Makula FRONT: Br. Clement, Jonathan, Jarrria, Yambusu, Br. Pascal

Noel commented that indeed many good things continue to happen within the District, but only the negatives go viral. The Network members are the essence reminders, and they understand what it means. We need them as much as they need us. The Leadership Teams are the guardians of the essence – the Brothers dignity and essence are safe with the leadership members. Community members must also be guardians in our communities to prevent escalation of our District issues. The District Leader finally thanked everyone for coming and officially declared the 2016 assembly opened.

Advocacy & the Universal Periodic Review

Brs. Brian Bond and Kevin Mullen: The first two days were facilitated by Brs. Brian Bond and Kevin Mullen from Edmund Rice International, based in Geneva. Their presentation included the following areas:

- Advocacy
- Human Rights
- Jesus as a Social Advocate
- The Universal Periodic Review etc.

Advocacy: Traditionally, the work of the Brothers has been providing services to the people. Now it’s prudent to ask why the people

are so much in need; that's the heart of advocacy – asking the right questions. The difference between charity response and justice response were also looked at.

Human Rights: They are the rights one enjoys simply because they are human. Rights are inalienable, indivisible and interrelated and interdependent. Everyone has a crucial role to play in the enhancement of fundamental human rights. This was followed by group discussions and subsequent reporting.

DAY 3

The third day started with a recap of the previous day's activities:

- Justice response does not replace charity response
- Right based approach takes a different dimension – it empowers people to take responsibility for themselves and it focuses on people's rights rather than providing basic services.
- Young people have rights that are to be respected; notwithstanding that, they have corresponding responsibilities.

The Universal Periodic Review:

1. Collection of data
2. Review of the process
3. Adoption of the report
4. Analysis of recommendation/follow up

Steps involved in writing the Report:

- Identify the human right issues
- Identify potential partners
- Collection of information
- Collection of data and research
- Drafting and editing
- Sending to the OHCHR
- Circulation and publication

Elements to be taken into Consideration:

- Concentrate on the particular issue
- Identify a particular Human issues

Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- The declaration of Geneva adopted five principles

- A child must be given a name
- The child must be the first to receive relief during a time of crisis
- A child must be put in a position of livelihood
- Optional protocols

The Millennium Development Goals

have the difference – all geared towards enhancing the full enjoyment of Human Rights. In 2014, a third optional protocol was ratified to allow children to report the violation of their rights directly. The convention on the rights of the child has 54 articles. The guiding principles of the convention include the following:

- None – Discrimination
- Best interest of the child
- Right to survival and development
- Right to participation

The Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations report on Sierra Leone was also looked at closely, taking to cognizance the following:

- The UPR
- Treaty Bodies
- Special Procedures

Each Community formulates Advocacy Plan:

At this stage the communities were asked to formulate their advocacy plans for their respective communities. This was done and each community had the opportunity to report to the large group.



Br. Brian Bond highlights
The Millennium
Development Goals



DAY 4: SUNDAY MORNING WAS FREE, WITH RENEWAL OF VOWS TAKING PLACE AT AFTERNOON EUCHARIST: Twenty West African Brothers renew their annual vows, (including Brs. Paul Mendy and Peter Kabia, who are on studies at Iona and Tangaza respectively). **LEFT PHOTO:** Br. Hugh O'Neill, Congregation Leader, witnesses the signing of the vows of Br. Leo. Kamara

DAY 5:

Day five heard from various speakers with opportunity for open forum after each speaker.

Mr. Emmanuel Tongai: The group also had the opportunity to listen to Emmanuel Tongai, a former Christian Brother and coordinator of the Edmund Rice Network in Bo, on a feedback report on community visitations. He started off by underscoring the relevance of time in the evangelization process, tracing the history of missionary activities in the sub-region, a number of which were short-lived. Kudos to the Christian Brothers for having been around all this while serving the people of God in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia and Ghana. He further interpreted the Congregation motto in his own way as: *Encouragement, Empowerment and Engagement*. Emmanuel contended that the Congregation has made tremendous achievements in Sierra Leone over the years, including:

- Leadership display
- Internationality

- Focused mission
- The expressed spirit of sharing
- The formation of the Edmund Rice Associate Groups – ERN and ERI

Mr. Emmanuel Tongai applauded the efforts of the Brothers and implored the Brothers to continue the good work they have begun within the District.

Congregation Leadership Team Presentation
Br. Hugh O'Neill



The Congregation Leader, Br. Hugh O'Neill, expressed profound thanks and appreciation for the warm reception into the District, and affirmed Brothers for the good work. He then briefly commented on the re-arrangement of the seating accommodation and to

this end he remarked: "I am here as Brother, I have a ministry my Brothers asked me to take on."

Hugh further noted that he is quite impressed with the number of annually professed Brothers in the District who renewed vows yesterday. In digression, he asked: *“Do you know what you were committing yourselves to?”* He further explained that the biggest difficulty we humans experience is moving beyond the “me”. What happens in religious life is that we commit ourselves in a relationship with the divine; but we cannot approach God when we are in charge. Connecting with the divine is a difficult task. Commitment to community is hard as well, that is why it is a strong witness to the gospel. Like most religious, we Christian Brothers have the culture of neglect. As Brother, we are trying to achieve a higher level of consciousness of our world, creation, others, ourselves and God. But sometimes we don’t seem to acknowledge our Brothers. We have to care for and have concern for our Brothers. The Congregation Leader says he really senses tremendous hope within the West African District and on that note he concluded his remarks.

Br. John Casey, member of the Congregation Leadership Team, started off with statistics of the current members of the Congregation and went on asking critical and thought provoking questions such as: *“Do you see yourselves as part of our Congregation beyond Africa?”* Would the District like the TST to select West Africa for the next Orientation Program and set up a Cluster of communities here? This he said was a decision for the District to make. Talking about the Brothers who left during the course of the year, he stated that if we are not careful, the same culture that didn’t nourish the lives of the men who have left might just engulf us if nothing is done. Who is next to leave? He asked. What are we doing to support each other? The challenge is can the West African District blossom instead of surviving? Seeds grow in silence and darkness and can we learn any lessons from that? As a youthful Brother, one should not neglect the time for personal reflection and silence.

DAY 6: Day six continued with input from speakers followed by opportunity for open forum.

Br. Dominic Sassi: Br. Dominic Sassi, European Province Deputy Province Leader, spoke of the quality of the fraternal reception and the experience friendship he has enjoyed since his arrival in Sierra Leone. In his introduction, he posed this question to the gathered Brothers – *“What are you passionate about?”* He furthered his thoughts by stating that there is no need to be passionate about financial sustainability or dependency if we are not passionate about the essence of being Brother. Being passionate means being involved unreservedly. What has religious life got to offer the people of this generation if not the search for God through mission? Br. Dominic emphatically stated that when we fall in love and stay in love, everything will fall in place at the right time.



Br. Clement Sindazi, African Province Deputy Leader, after expressing heart-felt thanks and appreciation to the Brothers for their warm welcome and hospitality, affirmed the Brothers of the District by stating

clearly: *“Good things are happening within this District”*. He also explained the components of the African Province’s mission structure as follow:

- Province Leadership Team
- Province Mission Leader
- Province Mission Bursar
- Province Finance Manager
- Province Compliance Coordinator

At District level, the mission structure is thus:

- District Leadership Team
- District Mission Coordinator
- Project Mangers

He further spoke on the pathway procedure hence, creating clarity for the Brothers on the new set up. All outstanding projects within the



District have now being completed. He also spoke on donor funding vs private funding. To the delight of all the Brothers in the room, he assured that all serious medical issues of Brothers will be looked after by the PLT. The Mission Support Team, he informed the Brothers, will soon be embarking on a capacity building assessment of the Brothers in each of the Districts, and requested all Brothers to cooperate with the process. He also explained to the gathering that study opportunities are now available in the United States, South Africa and India for Brothers with the entry requirement. Talking on sustainability he said, Brothers should initiate something at the local level. Finally, he informed the Brothers that the ERBT funding is being significantly cut-down.

THIS FINAL DAY OF ASSEMBLY INVOLVED THE DLT HOLDING AN OPEN FORUM

Br. Albert Gomez: The final day of the gathering began with an open forum as a follow up to the previous day's agenda and was followed by the DLT presentation, facilitated by Br. Albert Gomez, Deputy District Leader. Some of the items discussed were as follows:

- Accompaniment
- The issue of the identity of the Brothers
- The evaluation process for the renewal of vows
- Salaries for qualified Brothers
- Making our communities more vibrant
- Viable ministries
- Placement of Brothers
- District/community sustainability
- Vocation Promotion
- Relationships
- Community visitations – leadership
- Family support
- ERN/ERI groups
- Medical
- Finances
- Workers

In his closing remarks, Br. Noel expressed deep gratitude to all for their full participation. The guests at the assembly were also thanked for their display of true Brotherhood. He finally wished everyone a blessed and blissful

Christmas celebration and a prosperous New Year.

The 2016 West African District Assembly was climaxed at 5:30 p.m. with a simple reflection that was led by the Yengema community. A social gathering was held after supper and the assembly officially ended with departure after breakfast next morning, December 21st.

CONGRATULATIONS, PAUL MENDY

We take this opportunity on behalf of the Brothers of the District to say well done to our brother, Paul, who has successfully completed his studies for Bachelor of Arts Degree at Iona College, New York, majoring in History with an elective in Education. Paul will be travelling from N.Y. on December 29th to spend time with his family in The Gambia, before journeying to Sierra Leone. Hearty congratulations, our brother, on a work well done. Enjoy your well-deserved break in The Gambia.

THANKS AND APPRECIATION

Our thanks and appreciation to all who contributed to Wan Pot with news from around the District. We continue to ask our valuable readers and contributors to please send contributions to Brs. Leo Kamara and Joseph Gomeh.

alhajileokamara65@gmail.com
gomehjoseph@gmail.com