



NORWEGIAN  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

HAS THE MISSION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN GRAND BASSA  
COUNTY, LIBERIA PARTICIPATED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LIVES OF  
THE PEOPLE OF BASSA SINCE 2000 TO 2012?

Clarence Lamphere Benson

AVH5010 – Master's Thesis (60 ECTS – credits)

Master in Theology

Supervisor: Rev. Dr. Roar G. Fotland

A DRAFT PROPOSAL SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF THEOLOGY IN THE  
NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Spring 2013

MF – Norwegian School of Theology

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my late Father HENRY D. BENSON, SR., who worked all of his life to see his children achieve their dreams but the cold hands of death did not permit him to see this day. You will ever be remembered in my life as long as I live. Also, I will like to dedicate this thesis to my Mother MRS. ROSE GREENE BENSON, for her dedication her prayers and encouragement for her children to succeed in life.

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This thesis looks at how the people of Grand Bassa County perceive the work of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County. The introductory chapter gives a full outline of the thesis and highlights the profile of the thesis. It also states the problems, study objectives, research question and an overview of the literature which forms the basis for the study.

**Methodology:** The method used in was a qualitative approach where a semi-structure interview style of interviewing was employed. Semi-Structure Interview- is typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in a general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The interviewer also has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.

**Findings:** The research finds out that the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Grand Bassa County is participating in the transformation of lives of the Bassa people according to the five marks of global mission. However, the people of Grand Bassa County perceive the UMC to be more engaged in transformation through Proclamation, Teaching, Baptism and Nurturing its members and as well as other Christian and the Respond to Human needs by loving service such as the provision of schools, awarding of scholarships to the poor and disinherited in Grand Bassa County, health services delivery, improving their living conditions through the construction of Hand Pumps, connecting farms to market roads and building bridges, which the people believe are crucial to their survival. However, the study further find out that not much has been done in the areas of transforming the unjust Structures of Society as the people are divided on the topic. While some feel that the church is playing her role in addressing the unjust structure of society, there are many others who believe that the church is silent and needs to wake up if the church must be the voice of the voiceless. On the fifth mark of mission, the people believe that the church has not and is not doing much to educate the people on the danger of climate change.

**Conclusion:** The thesis concludes with a summary and cite some observations and suggests where the church needs to pay attention in it mission based on the five marks of Walls and Ross five marks of mission. Thesis finds out that the church is making significant progress in light of the first, second and third marks of mission. However, according to the interviewees, the church needs to do more when it comes to the church the church addressing the social structure of society in Grand Bassa county and to enlighten people on sustaining the earth.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study has been possible through the contributions of many people and I give my sincere thanks to them all. I will like to convey my deepest gratitude to my academic supervisor, Rev. Dr. Roar G. Fotland for his invaluable guidance and constructive comments throughout the study. I express special thanks to my friends and colleagues in Norway for their friendship, support and the sharing of ideas throughout the period that we have known each other.

Last but not least, I would like to specially acknowledge my parents, Mother, my siblings and all family members for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my journey in this course.

## List of Abbreviations

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| AFL    | Arm Forces of Liberia                                      |
| DCS    | Department of Community Services LAC/UMC                   |
| ECOMOG | Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States                  |
| GBCO   | Grand Bassa County   |
| INPFL  | Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia            |
| ISO    | International Organization for Standardization             |
| LAC    | Liberia Annual Conference                                  |
| LAP    | Liberia Action Party                                       |
| LCC    | Liberian Council of Churches                               |
| LUP    | Liberia Unification Party                                  |
| LURD   | Liberia United for Reconciliation and                      |
| MODEL  | Movement for Democracy in Liberia                          |
| NDPL   | National Democratic Party of Liberia                       |
| NPFL   | National Patriotic Front of Liberia                        |
| PRC    | People Redemption Council                                  |
| TWP    | True Weigh Party   |
| UMC    | United Methodist Church                                    |
| UP     | Unity Party  |
| UPP    | United People's Party                                      |
| WHO    | World Health Organization                                  |

## Table of Contents

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>DEDICATION</i> .....  | <i>I</i>   |
| <i>ABSTRACT</i> .....  | <i>II</i>  |
| <i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i> .....  | <i>III</i> |
| <i>Table of Contents</i> .....   | <i>V</i>   |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>1.1 Profile of Study Site</b> .....   | <b>4</b>   |
| <b>1.2 Problem Statement</b> .....   | <b>8</b>   |
| <b>1.3 Justification and purpose of the study</b> .....  | <b>9</b>   |
| <b>1.4 Study Objectives</b> .....  | <b>10</b>  |
| <b>1.5 Research Questions</b> .....  | <b>10</b>  |
| 1.5.1 Additional Questions .....   | 10         |
| <b>1.6 Area and scope of the study</b> .....   | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>1.7 Conceptual Model</b> .....  | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>1.8 Research Methodology</b> .....  | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>1.9 Literature Review</b> .....   | <b>13</b>  |
| <b>1.10 Research Ethics</b> .....  | <b>13</b>  |
| <b>1.11 Structure and Organization of the Thesis</b> .....   | <b>14</b>  |
| <b>2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....  | <b>15</b>  |
| <b>2.1 Definition of the term</b> .....  | <b>15</b>  |
| <b>2.2 Concepts of Transformation</b> .....  | <b>15</b>  |
| 2.2.1 Proclamation .....   | 16         |
| 2.2.2 Baptism and Nurturing.....   | 20         |
| 2.2.3 Political Awareness.....   | 22         |
| 2.2.4 Nurturing of the young converts .....  | 23         |
| 2.2.5 The Church’s Response to Human Needs by loving Service.....  | 23         |
| 2.2.6 To seek to transform unjust structures of society.....   | 25         |
| 2.2.7 To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth ..... | 27         |
| 2.2.8 Degradation of the life of the earth .....   | 28         |
| <b>2.3 Historical background of the research</b> .....   | <b>29</b>  |
| 2.3.1 Grand Bassa County .....   | 38         |
| 2.3.2 The United Methodist Church in Liberia.....  | 38         |
| <b>3 Research Methodology</b> .....  | <b>41</b>  |
| <b>3.1 The Method Used</b> .....   | <b>41</b>  |
| <b>3.2 Identification of population and sample</b> .....   | <b>43</b>  |
| <b>3.3 Field Research Instruments</b> .....  | <b>44</b>  |

|            |  |            |
|------------|--|------------|
| <b>3.4</b> | <b>Data Analysis and Presentation.....</b>   | <b>44</b>  |
| <b>3.5</b> | <b>Retrospective Reflections on the field .....</b>  | <b>45</b>  |
| <b>4</b>   | <b><i>PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....</i></b>   | <b>47</b>  |
| <b>4.1</b> | <b>Transformation through Proclamation of the Word:.....</b>                                   | <b>48</b>  |
| <b>4.2</b> | <b>Baptism, Teaching and Nurturing.....</b>  | <b>53</b>  |
| 4.2.1      | Baptism.....   | 53         |
| 4.2.2      | Teaching and Nurturing.....  | 57         |
| <b>4.3</b> | <b>Speaking for the poor and against injustices in the Liberian society .....</b>              | <b>61</b>  |
| <b>4.4</b> | <b>The Church’s Response to Human Needs by loving Service.....</b>                             | <b>74</b>  |
| 4.4.1      | Transformation through Education: .....  | 74         |
| 4.4.2      | Transformation through Health care.....  | 85         |
| 4.4.3      | Transformation through Water and Sanitation.....   | 89         |
| 4.4.4      | Transformation through Construction of Roads and Bridges .....                                 | 94         |
| <b>4.5</b> | <b>To seek to transform unjust structures of society .....</b>                                 | <b>99</b>  |
| 4.5.1      | Polygamy .....   | 100        |
| 4.5.2      | Female Genital Mutilation .....  | 108        |
| 4.5.3      | The United Methodist Church response to Social Injustices .....                                | 117        |
| <b>4.6</b> | <b>Safeguarding the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth ....</b> | <b>123</b> |
| <b>5</b>   | <b><i>Conclusion .....</i></b>   | <b>130</b> |
| <b>6</b>   | <b><i>Reference.....</i></b>   | <b>134</b> |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Mission of the United Methodist Church as highlighted in its Book of Discipline is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”<sup>1</sup> What is this transformation that the church is talking about? What is disciple making? Has the church’s idea of transformation been felt by the communities in which it is administering? I grew up in Edina City, Grand Bassa County, Liberia and observed the work of the church as it administered in the community. I tried to sense a difference when people are in church and out in the community.

The atmosphere in the church was more peaceful, people who will not dare to speak to one other on the outside will surely do once they were in the church, either willingly or for the fear that they were in the presence of God. The attitude of the members of the church was most of the time much better than those that were not church members. The church bell rang every Sunday and some days in the week and many people would go in and out of the church all of the time.

There were times when the word was preached the whole week and Youth and Young Adults would sleep in the church on what was termed “mourner bench” or “Sinner Bench” word. Regular services were held every night with boys and girls, men and women sometimes shouting very loudly. At certain times of the day or in the middle of the night, one or two would bounce up and run all around the town shouting that they had received Christ and has embrace religion.

I remember also the manner in which some of these young people went to greet the community on their newly found religion. They were sent back to pray until they got the Holy Spirit and embraced the new religion which would then redirect the attitude of the young converts. The Gospel was preached and taught to give guidance to people and such guidance taught them to love one another and to show such love in deeds, that is, taking love

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville 2008:p 87



from a more abstract state to a more physical state where it could be seen or felt by everyone. This was done in an effort to teach people how to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

The church preached, baptised, nurtured and provided spiritual guidance to its members. The pastor was taught to be a community pastor and not a Sheppard to the Methodists only. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, my local church, the Thomas James King United Methodist Church was taught to be

- “Welcoming and open to all persons.
- Honoring God through acts of personal and corporate worship.
- Gathering together in community to encourage and support others on their faith journey.
- Spending time to entertain strangers.
- Reaching out in love both locally and nationwide for the transformation of the world.

Since the establishment of the United Methodist Church in Liberia and Grand Bassa in particular, it seems the Church has made significant impact in its expansion. But is it so and to what extent has the church been able to transform the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County? This research intends to explore if the church is helping to transform the lives of the people of Bassa, especially during the years 2000 to 2012. This research will concentrate on the work of the UMC as it relates to the transformation of the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County, Liberia.

What is transformation in the light of the church’s mission? What is transformation?

Transformation is the creation and change of a whole new form, function or structure. To transform is to improve something for better results. It is a “change” in mindset. It is based on learning a system of profound knowledge and taking actions based on leading with knowledge and courage.<sup>2</sup> In this research, I will employ transformation to mean improving something for the better.

Has the church participated in the transformation of the lives of the Bassa people? If so, how? Andrews Walls and Cathy Ross named five marks of mission of the church. Can the UMC in

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mdaszko.com/theoryoftransformation\\_final\\_to\\_short\\_article\\_apr05.pdf](http://www.mdaszko.com/theoryoftransformation_final_to_short_article_apr05.pdf), accessed November 27, 2012

Grand Bassa County be measured against those marks? J. Andrew Kirk focused his attention on “the Gospel in the midst of culture” and “the church’s role in securing justice for the poor.” The church, according to the reports of the District Superintendents of the two major districts of Grand Bassa County, have in the past laid emphasis on agriculture, education, nurturing its members and proclamation of the word as its methods of transforming communities and individuals. What is it like after the year 2000?

Since the end of the civil war, there are many things that happened to re-acquire a more holistic package of transformation. The war created the arming of children, increased corruption, the rise of female genital mutilation in the name of culture and untold suffering of the people of Liberia in general and Grand Bassa in particular. How is the church participating in addressing these issues in a bid to transform the lives of the people of Bassa? The research wishes to explore the mission of the church in line with Walls and Ross’ five marks of mission which will be explained later.

- 1 To proclaim the good news of the kingdom
- 2 To teach, baptize, and nurture the new believers
- 3 To respond to human needs by loving service
- 4 To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- 5 To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>3</sup>

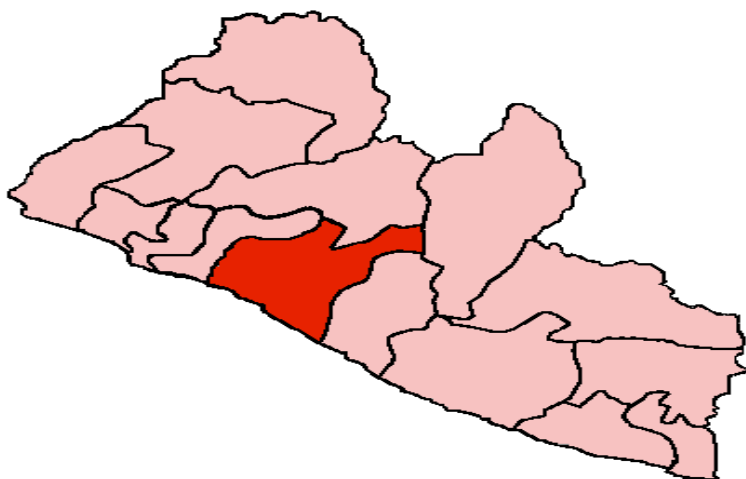
While they hasten to suggest that their models of mission is not complete, it gives an idea of what mission ought to be when it comes to transforming the lives of people. Hence it will serve as the basis for the evaluation of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, Liberia.

---

<sup>3</sup> Walls Andrew and Ross Cathy, *Mission In The 21ST Century, Exploring The Five Marks Of Global Mission*; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1 Spencer Court 140-142 Wands worth High Street London SW184JJ; 2008: p xiv

## 1.1 Profile of Study Site

Grand Bassa County is one of the three original counties of Liberia and one of the original three districts of the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church along with Monrovia and St. Paul River Districts.



The map of Liberia showing Grand Bassa County highlighted February 28, 2013.<sup>4</sup>

Grand Bassa County has two major districts of the United Methodist Church, with the Kakata Farmington River District still controlling a few churches. According to the reports, “the Grand Bassa and St. John River Districts have a little over 118 Clergy shepherding over 12,000 United Methodists in more than 40 churches and preaching points.”<sup>5</sup>

The United Methodist Church operates churches spread across all political and geographical districts of Grand Bassa County. It is based on the operational landscape of the church that this project wishes to assess whether the church is helping to transform the lives of the people.

The County is located in the area from latitude 6°45' to latitude 5°30' North, and from longitude 10°30' to longitude 9°00' West (ISO 3166-2 geocode: LR-GB). On the

<sup>4</sup> *Grand Bassa County Development Agenda Document*, accessed February 28, 2013

<sup>5</sup> *Districts Suoerintendents Reports* delievered at the Kuoo Henty United Methodist Church, Kokoyah District Conference, LAC/UMC, Feburary 6-12, 2012

Southwest of the County there is the Atlantic Ocean. Grand Bassa borders with four counties: Margibi on the Northwest, Bong on the North, Nimba on the East, and River Cess on the Southeast. The total land area the County is approximately 3,382 square miles (8,759 square kilometres).<sup>6</sup>

As the name 'Bassa' indicates, Grand Bassa County is predominantly inhabited by the Bassa tribes, one of Liberia's 17 ethnic groups of Liberia. The Bassa tribe also has predominant heritage in three other counties in Liberia to include: Rivercess, a former territory of Grand Bassa County that was given county status in 1989 along with Margibi, a county made up of land from both Grand Bassa and Montserrado Counties, and Montserrado County.

Grand Bassa County is represented in the National Legislature by 2 senators and 5 representatives.

The Bassa ethnics group is the second largest in Liberia, followed by the Kpelle people from central Liberia. According to the agenda report:

94% of the population of Grand Bassa County are from the Bassa ethnic group, while 5% speak Kpelle and the remainder 1% is distributed between other local tribes and migrant from neighbouring countries such as Ghana.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike many tribes in Liberia, the Bassa people have their own Bassa script known as *Bassa Vah*, meaning "to throw a sign."<sup>8</sup> The alphabet is written from left to right and right to left. The origins of the Bassa alphabets are unclear.

The alphabet fell out of use in Liberia during the 19th century. In the 1900s, a Bassa by the name of Dr. Flo Darvin Lewis discovered that former slaves of Bassa origin living in Brazil and the West Indies were still using the Bassa alphabet. Dr Lewis had

---

<sup>6</sup> *Grand Bassa County Development Agenda Document*, accessed February 28, 2013

<sup>7</sup> *Grand Bassa County Development Agenda Document*, accessed February 28, 2013

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

not encountered the alphabet before and, after learning it himself, he decided to try to revive the alphabet in Liberia.<sup>9</sup>

|         |     |       |     |      |       |      |     |     |     |    |
|---------|-----|-------|-----|------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|----|
| ᄃᄃ      | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ    | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ   | ᄃᄃ    | ᄃᄃ   | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ |
| ehni    | ka  | sa    | fa  | mbe  | yeeay | ga   | dii | kpa | ja  |    |
| n       | k   | s     | f   | mb   | ɛ, ɛ  | g    | d   | kp  | j   |    |
| ᄃᄃ      | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ    | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ   | ᄃᄃ    | ᄃᄃ   | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ |
| whah    | wah | zau   | gbu | udau | chay  | uwuu | tau | bah | vu  |    |
| hw / xw | w   | z     | gb  | ɛ    | c     | hw   | t   | b   | v   |    |
| ᄃᄃ      | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ    | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ   | ᄃᄃ    | ᄃᄃ   | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ  | ᄃᄃ |
| yaayin  | pah | uwada | ah  | auh  | oh    | uuh  | aay | eh  | iih |    |
| h       | p   | r/l   | a   | ɔ    | o     | u    | e   | ɛ   | i   |    |

#### Bassa alphabet<sup>10</sup>

|         | a  | ɔ  | o  | u  | e  | ɛ  | i  |
|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| high    | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ |
| grave   | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ |
| mid-low | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ |
| drag    | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ |
| double  | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ | ᄃᄃ |

#### The Bassa tone<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

48 333-7747 18 94473-77 97343,  
 484 77373-77 7773 10404 9473-113.  
 18 17 9747 77477-7773 7040-777  
 18 44 97373 113-113 7773 48  
 7773, 18 17 9747 94 1777 773-44  
 18 70 97373 90 477 17.

Sample Text <sup>12</sup>

Dé ni-díqí kè bédèin-dyí múe, déè nyuün-dyù séin wóqóe béin wǒ. Ké wa bédé hwíqíi pòin  
 hwòqò-dyùà kè dè múin wǒ-wǒ sèin dé dycún, ké wa bédé bé waà nyudè ké gbo muin bó díí  
 kà.

Sample text and transliteration by Peter Gorwor from Liberia <sup>13</sup>

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with  
 reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.  
 (*Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*)

Translation by Peter Gorwor from Liberia <sup>14</sup>

Today, the Christian Extension Mission (CEM) and the Christian Educational Foundation of  
 Liberia have made significant gain in writing and teaching the Bassa *Vah* to many people.  
 The Holy Bible has also been translated into the Bassa *Vah* which has improved the  
 expansion of the Christian ministry in the county, especially for those who cannot write and  
 read or speak English.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The United Methodist Church has existed in Grand Bassa County, Liberia for over a hundred years. What the church has done in its existence in the county has not been documented, thus making it difficult to evaluate its mission.

The UMC mission is to make disciples for the transformation of the world. To transform a society is to advocate for the political and social rights of the people such as, the rights to life, liberty, health care, and education. These are rights that should be protected by all and the church should be a torch bearer in advocating for these rights. For the proclamation of the word to be effective, the church should tend to engage the power that be, to ensure that the rights of the people are respected. Has the UMC lived up to its mission of making disciples to transform the world?

Secondly, besides addressing and transforming the systems that tend to undermine the growth and development of the individual, the need for the church to address local cultural norms such as polygamy, female genital mutilation in areas it is administering, cannot be over emphasized. It is often said that the truth hurts and it is incumbent upon the church to speak the truth irrespective of how people will feel about their engagements or how they might look at the church to be culturally motivated and fearing that some might feel rejected.

Has the church utilized its authority in Grand Bassa County to meet the needs of the people? Has it lived up to its mission of transforming the county? What are the concerns of the church mission in Grand Bassa County? The answers to these questions will be given primarily by the people of Grand Bassa County themselves.

Is the church proclaiming the gospel and building God's Kingdom here on earth, or, is it standing up to transform unjust structures of society in the county as part of its mission; or is the church teaching, baptizing and nurturing new believers; or how has it responded to human needs and shown loving services to the people; or is it securing justice for the poor in Grand Bassa County? These are the issues that this research wishes to explore.

### **1.3 Justification and purpose of the study**

The research is intended to look at the work of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County as it relates to its mission of transforming the lives of the people of the County, especially after the year 2000.

I developed an interest in writing about this part of the church's work because of personal interest in mission work, which I developed from my attachment period in Malawi and the expansion of my missionary knowledge at the MF Norwegian School of Theology.

Secondly, my interest in writing about this part of the church work expressly from Grand Bassa County perspective is based on the fact that no one had seen the need to write about the church's mission in this part of the world.

The United Methodist Church is one of the largest denominations working with people in Grand Bassa County, Liberia. However, in Liberia, there is a proverb which says "upon the old mat, the new mat is platted," which means that the old story gives you guidance to write a new one. It is startling to know, however, that apart from the church's District Superintendent's reports which highlight the thoughts of that superintendent, there has not been any independent writing of the activities or work of the church since its founding, exclusively for Grand Bassa County.

How outsiders perceive the mission work has not been explored. Therefore, it is the purpose of this research to be carried out in Grand Bassa County to document the mission work of the church as it relates to the church's role in transforming the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County especially after the year 2000.

The research will be conducted through cross section of the people of Grand Bassa County and examining the impact of the church's mission statement: to make disciples for the transformation of the world. I hope that this research will serve as a basis for future researches to be carried out in the county so that the work of the church could be evaluated properly. Many studies have been carried out on the topic, but not in the territorial confines of this research.



The key point of this research is to explore what the church has done or is doing for the transformation of the holistic human person in addition to the proclamation of the word. The emphasis of the research is on that little thing that has helped a person or a community to say, We do not know what would have happened to us if it had not been for the United Methodist Church.

## **1.4 Study Objectives**

Specifically the study seeks to:

1. Explore the level at which the church is proclaiming the word in Grand Bassa County.
2. Explore the level and extent of the church's mission responding to human needs such as education, health, sanitation, caring for the widows, orphans and war affected children and youth, and women rights in Grand Bassa County.
3. Explore the role the church is playing in challenging the unjust structure of the Liberian Society, especially corruption in Grand Bassa County.
4. Explore if the church is teaching, baptizing and nurturing the people of Bassa, especially its members.
5. Understand what the people comprehend about sustaining the earth.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

To what degree do people in Grand Bassa County in Liberia think that the United Methodist Church has participated in the transformation of life in the County?

### **1.5.1 Additional Questions**

- 1 How are the teaching, proclaiming and nurturing ministries of the UMC helping to transform the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County?
- 2 Which area of need for the people of Bassa is the UMC mission responding to?
- 3 What has the church done to transform the lives of the underprivileged, needy, orphans, and war affected youth and child soldiers in Bassa?
- 4 How is the church dealing with the issue of justice for the poor?
- 5 How is the church dealing with environmental issues that affect Grand Bassa County?

## 1.6 Area and scope of the study

The research is intended to be carried out in Grand Bassa County, Liberia. It is intended to explore the mission of the UMC as it relates to what the church is actually doing to help change the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County in keeping with the five marks of mission according to Walls and Ross. The study is intended to cover the eight geographical districts of Grand Bassa County. It will focus mainly on the diaconal part of mission such as; education, health, sanitation, speaking against culture and social injustices, and what might be of importance to the people of Grand Bassa County.

## 1.7 Conceptual Model

The study is guided by the Walls and Ross' five marks of mission listed below, which will be expanded later in the proceeding chapter 2.

1. To proclaim the good news of the kingdom
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture the new believers
3. To respond to human needs by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>15</sup>

Based on these concepts, the research intends to examine whether the UMC in Grand Bassa County fits into these concepts of mission.

## 1.8 Research Methodology

In this research I will explore the work of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, Liberia as it relates to how the church is carrying out its mission work in helping the people of the county.

By doing an empirical study, I wish to explore the understanding of how people perceive the work of the United Methodist Church as it relates to participation in disciple making and transformation of the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County. The aim is to understand

---

<sup>15</sup> Walls Andrew and Ross Cathy, *Mission In The 21ST Century, Exploring The Five Marks Of Global Mission*; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1 Spencer Court 140-142 Wands worth High Street London SW184JJ; 2008: p xiv

different views of people from various dimensions: Methodist, non-Methodist, and politicians in their capacity as politicians though they might be Methodist or non-Methodist.

Since I will be looking at a more practical perception of mission as it relates to transformation, people outside of the church will be of importance in that though they might not appreciate the church's work from the inside, they might be able to see the practical results. The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative in-depth interview.

I chose the qualitative research because it emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy it will take a more inductive position. A semi-structure interview scheduled made for the research will be used to generate data from various samples of people in Grand Bassa County.

Semi-Structure Interview - typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in a general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The interviewer also has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, for a wider knowledge of the topic, I will gather information from the bishop of the United Methodist Church, the Human Rights Coordinator, and the head of the project office of the United Methodist Church through interviews and informal conversations. I will also review the journals of the LAC/UMC from the year 2000-2012 and carry out some observations of physical projects where possible. The sum of the interviews, conversations and observations will serve as the basis for the analysis.

The main tool in the field, in addition to the researcher himself, is an interview guide that is made to the context in question. One interview guide has been developed in English but will be translated into Bassa in case there are interviewees who might not be able to speak English very well, for the sake of documentation. In such a case, an interpreter will be asked to assist in the process. In order to process accurate data, I will record all interviews and transcribe them shortly after the field work period.

---

<sup>16</sup> Byrman Alan, *Social Research Method 4<sup>th</sup> edition*; Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford ox26DP, Oxford New York; 2011: p716

## 1.9 Literature Review

Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission (2008), edited by Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, has contributed the main literature for this research. In this edition, the editors gathered articles that give guidance to research project on the mission of the church. They presented several theories that relate to the research question ‘to what degree do people in Grand Bassa County in Liberia think that the United Methodist Church has participated in the transformation of life in the County?’ The topics listed under the five marks of mission will be matched with the mission of the UMC in Grand Bassa County to see if the church is participating in mission seen by these scholars. J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Exploration* (1999), highlights the church’s role in securing justice for the poor. Arthur F. Kulah, *Liberia Will Rise Again* (1999), concludes that the church should be the watcher and the Shepherd of the nation. Though not agreed on the level of political and social affairs, the church must realize that it has responsibilities. The church must ensure that the government carries out God’s will for God’s people. Christianity must continue the holistic approach to ministry to meet the total needs of the people. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology Faith and Culture*, 2002:p26

## 1.10 Research Ethics

As this study has some cultural issues which are very sensitive in the Liberian context, I will be very cautious when collecting and handling data. All interviewees will be anonymized, avoiding names and other information that may identify the respondents except where the participants have consented to their disclosure. In addition, information regarding the objective of the research will be given to the participants. This is what David Silverman (2010) refers to as “informed decision on possible involvement.”<sup>17</sup>

I will be very clear when communicating with interviewees, on their individual’s rights to withdraw from the research at any point of the study.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Silverman, David *Doing Qualitative Research, Third Edition* SAGE, Publications Ltd. 1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP, 2010: P155

<sup>18</sup> Silverman 2010: p155

Religious views will be given much priority in this research since participants might be of different religions.

In the area of the study dealing with traditional issues, I will be very careful to observe the interviewee's content, gesture and tone in response to the questions relating to the church's role in speaking for the rights of girls and women that are forced into the culture especially when it comes to female genital mutilation (FGM), which is "recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women."<sup>19</sup>

### **1.11 Structure and Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. Chapter 1 sets out the general premise of the research and the problem statement. It clarifies the method and the approach used for data gathering and analysis. Chapter 2 is concerned with the definition and conceptual framework of transformation and also gives the background and brief history of Liberia, Grand Bassa County in Liberia and the United Methodist Church in Liberia in general and in Grand Bassa County in particular. Chapter 3 details the method used in the field report from Grand Bassa County, Liberia. Chapter 4 is concerned with the presentation and analysis and discussion of the field data gathered through the interviews from the field in Liberia's Grand Bassa County and the United Methodist Church Headquarters in Monrovia, Liberia. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis.

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/female-genital-mutilation/> October 11, 2012

## 2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will be looking at the definition of the term transformation and explaining the concepts. Also, I will look at other scholarly works that set the basis for adopting the concepts I have chosen for the study. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross' book, *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* will be the main text from which I will draw my theory for this project.

### 2.1 Definition of the term

The term “transformation” is derived from the Latin roots, *trans* (across, or more loosely, to change) and *forma* (that which shapes, that which has been shaped). Webster (2004) offers a number of definitions. A change or alteration, especially a radical one.<sup>20</sup> A marked change in nature, form or appearance.<sup>21</sup> An act, process, or instance of transforming or being transformed. The state of being transformed. A marked change as in appearance or character, usually for the better. An act, process or instance of change in structure, appearance or character. A conversion, revolution, makeover, alteration, or renovation.<sup>22</sup> These definitions suggest several aspects of transformation. However, for this thesis, I will employ transformation as a change aimed at improving human life.

### 2.2 Concepts of Transformation

When Andrews Walls and Cathy Ross discussed their five marks of global mission of the church, it reasoned to that when these marks are applied to a situation, will see a change either in a community or individual life. In light of transformation for example, when the word is proclaimed and someone gets converted, there are normally a lot of changes that occurs in the life of the individual, he or she no more see things like before. Or when there is a response to human needs by loving to feed the hungry, that person that who is fed or educated or healed through the church's mission normally has a different attitude towards his neighbours.

---

<sup>20</sup> Hanks Patrick, *Collins dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition*; William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd, Glasgow G4 0NB, p 1615

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Soanes *Concise Oxford English Dictionary Eleventh Edition*, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford Ox26DP; New York, 2004: p 1531

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.nri-inc.org/report\\_pubs/2005/ConceptsOfTransf2005.pdf](http://www.nri-inc.org/report_pubs/2005/ConceptsOfTransf2005.pdf), December 10, 2012

If one is converted to be a Christian, there should be some changes in his behaviour in the community in where he or she lives, and the initial change should lead the individual into a better person. For example, Paul in Acts Chapter 9: 1- 9 on the road to Damascus, was a prosecutor of Christians, but when he was transformed he became something extremely new that the whole world could not imagine and his change and growth in the Christian faith made him to become one of the greatest Christians of all times. Hence, transformation should lead to a change that should have never been imagined but when it does take place, it should be visible. These marks of missions lead to the transformation of an individual, organization, system or a nation if they are persuaded.

According to the UMC's District Superintendent's reports in Grand Bassa County, the church in the past concentrated on agriculture, education, proclamation of the word, and nurturing as the basis for mission and transformation. Since the civil war, there are many things that had happened that require a greater emphasis on the UMC's transformational strategies. The war created the arming of children, the rise of female genital mutilation in the name of culture, increase in diseases, HIV and AIDS, the breaking down of the moral structure of society and untold suffering of the people due to the increase in corruption, the rise in food prices and every basic commodity, lack of social services, water, power and an extended gap between the governing class and the ordinary Liberia in general and Grand Bassa in particular.

Has or is the church participating in addressing these issues in a bid to transform the lives of the people of Bassa? The research wishes to explore the mission of the church as indicated by Walls and Ross. I will now look at the marks of mission in a more detail form as was listed above.

### **2.2.1 Proclamation**

Walls and Ross define proclamation as a mark of mission that tends to transform as “a formal public announcement from a royalty as in biblical days”.<sup>23</sup> Jesus began his ministry proclaiming, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). The good news of the Kingdom was declared: “The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). More than two thousand

---

<sup>23</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p 3

years later, these themes continue to make impact and calls for a renewed commitment for the church.

Walls and Ross highlighted that:

People today see proclamation in two ways. Some tend to believe that it is only the confrontational kind of proclamation that is the true preaching of the Gospel, while others have seen the power of different creative presentation. They argued that whatever style we employed, there are some basic attitudinal problems we need to eliminate, which they suggest as condemnation and arrogance we have often seen in some confrontations.<sup>24</sup>

They give samples of both kinds of proclamation as used in the New Testament:

Peter in Acts 2 offers the kind of proclamation that the earliest Christians shared. The audience was Jewish. Israelites from many nations would have come to Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) at the time of Pentecost. The spirit would pour out on that day when the prophetic promises would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And now says Peter, is the day when “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Acts 2:21). Jesus came in the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The prophets looked forward to the day when God would renew Israel, pour out his spirit and enable them to live in conformity to his covenant. Peter’s proclamation is straight forward, even daring in comparison to the frightened disciples he was prior to the resurrection. He presents Jesus who came with power and performs signs and wonders. Jesus was crucified and God raised him from the dead. The same Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, (v.38). And God has made the crucified and risen Jesus both Lord and Christ (vv. 34-36). Peter put forth his facts very plainly even accusing the Jews of putting Jesus to death. His hearers ‘were cut to the heart’ and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied straightforward, “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (v. 38). Peter warned and pleaded with them (v.40) and about 3000 were added to the fellowship.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Walls and Ross:2008:p5

<sup>25</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:pp 7-8



However, that was the only model of proclamation that might not be the viable one for our world today especially in Africa and Asia, where freedom of speech is a thing of words and not deed.

Asian and African evangelists deliver such messages as though they are in North America or Europe. African Evangelists do not alter the language but use it as though they are in the west. Aggressive crusades are still conducted and welfare language liberally employed with no concern for damage being done. There is arrogance reminiscent of the colonial days and people are reacting to such presentations.

In contrast to Peter's confrontation of the Jews, Paul in Areopagean speech attempts to establish continuity between the Gospel and the worship of Athenians. It is a very positive introduction - 'I perceive in every way that you are very religious' (Acts 17:22). He had observed many things which brought him to this conclusion, chief among them being 'the altar of the unknown God.' The continuity that Paul established need to be considered for lessons of our proclamation today. Just like the 'faith' that Jesus was able to commend positively in the life of the Gentile centurion, Paul is able to commend the worship of the Athenians, even though this is to an unknown God.

Paul commends their sincere desire to worship the true God and not the material manifestation in the form of idol. This approach is necessary for Asia where we meet men and women desirous of worship of a true God. Some deny idols, even those trapped in idolatry display a longing for God. Traditionally, whether it was missionaries who preached in Asia and Africa, or local evangelists in their own situations, there has been condemnation rather than commendation. Our attitude of presenting a radical discontinuity between one's present faith and the saving faith in Jesus Christ must be reviewed.

Sadly, preaching continues today in the condemnatory style that has offended many and even gave rise to fundamentalist demonstration against Christians. We have directed our message on sin against the religious practices of many sincere worshippers, taking a superior position as we look down condescendingly at the religions of our hearers. This has only built up barriers that hinder those whom we present the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an

urgent need of seeing continuity between those to whom we present the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ to whom we want them to be led.

Paul has no problem accepting the Athenian sincerity and building on their conception, or lack of conception of God. One can see such contacts point in Asia and Africa on which a more positive proclamation of the Gospel could be built. Paul is not condemning any of the known gods, that they are worshipping, nor is he saying that their religion is leading them to the true God. He is certainly willing to see within their religious attitudes an inherent desire to know the truth God.

Once there is a condemnation, one stands the risk of putting up a fight instead of resolving or bringing people to the point of realization for a possible position to change. It is easier for one to accept a situation if he/she is engaged in secret rather than being condemned in the public.

Our current context of increasing religious fundamentalism is leading us to review our practice of proclamation. Some believe that it is only the confrontational kind of proclamation that is true preaching of the Gospel, while others have seen the power of different creative presentation such as sober engagement.

Whatever the style we employed, there are some attitudinal problems we will need to eliminate. These are to do with condemnation and arrogance we have often seen employed in such confrontations.

From the period of the Reformation, proclamation has been crucial to the church's being. Calvin, like Luther was fighting against the institutionalized understanding of the Roman Church.<sup>26</sup> Luther enumerated other marks of the church but went on to underline only the preaching of the word.

The church is pure, Luther claimed, where the pure Gospel is preached, that the church does not make the word but it comes into being from the word.<sup>27</sup> This is an important assertion of

---

<sup>26</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p9

<sup>27</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p9

Luther, calling on Christian churches to remember that the church did not make the word, rather the word made the church and that the church should preach the word at all cost, time and place.

Today, the reformers' stress on proclamation will need to be fleshed out completely, considering what we have seen in the New Testament and the heavy stress on accompanying demonstration of the kingdom. While there is a need to renew our allegiance to proclaim the word faithfully, there is a greater need to flesh the message out in acts that express the kingdom. Proclamation is urgent, but it will also want to see some concrete demonstration of this message. It is the spelling out of the kingdom identity, in presenting the person of Jesus and not just the message of Jesus; in looking at Jesus and the way that his message was demonstrated with power and authority that the church will be concretizing the kingdom of God through tangible expression of the kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup>

### **2.2.2 Baptism and Nurturing**

As a mark of the church Mission, Walls and Ross state that "Baptism brings believers into membership of the body of the church."<sup>29</sup> They stressed that "our foundational unity with each other and with all fellow Christians are rooted in our baptism in Christ".<sup>30</sup> They further explained that the Great commission commands us to make disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing.....teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20), emphasizing that, to make disciples today, the church must invest time and effort in a long and careful process of nurturing and transformation. Belonging must be followed by teaching, worship and behaving in conformity with Christian ethics and doctrine, stressing that the church must provide ongoing accompaniment during the disciple journey.

Context and culture are issues that should be taken into consideration in the achievement of the church's mission. "The matter of culture affects every aspects of mission including

---

<sup>28</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p10

<sup>29</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p9

<sup>30</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p 40

proclamation.”<sup>31</sup> Walls and Ross highlight that: “Jesus speaks to people in their own current context so that Christians can feel at home; the local culture is very important if the gospel is to be incarnated in the hearts of the people.”<sup>32</sup> However, they warned against a mere preservation of cultural heritage, but stressed that “the good values of culture such as solidarity, harmony, unity, participation, and sharing through its teaching and its way of living.”<sup>33</sup> They emphasize that:

Natural family value such as love for others, openness, and acceptance help to build a Christian sense of mission that find its proper context in service, adding that the local context is value in order for it to contribute to the world-wide Christian family.<sup>34</sup>

However, one should be aware of the danger of keeping cultural practices that tends to undermine the very rights of people they were meant to protect such as in the case of Grand Bassa County, female genital mutilation, patriarchy and polygamy.

One critical fact to consider when looking at the church’s role in dealing with culture is that “the matter of culture affects every aspects of mission.”<sup>35</sup> It is all-inclusive. Kirk wrote: “If we ignore the influence of culture, we run the risk of seriously misreading situation.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, culture should be taken as a very key aspect of mission and should be transformed but with caution so that everyone can still feel included.

The gospel is always culturally mediated. It is true that the gospel is genuinely trans-cultural. However, it can only be expressed in terms of culture and therefore has to be communicated from one culture to another in a rich variety of ways.

The Gospel is made out of many pieces of good news and to understand them, people have to hear them in their own language (Acts 2:8). The message, though having a divine origin, is

---

<sup>31</sup> Kirk, Andrew J. *What is Mission? Theological Exploration*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1 Spencer Court, 140-142 Wandsworth High Street, London SW184JJ, 2002

<sup>32</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p44

<sup>33</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p44

<sup>34</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p44

<sup>35</sup> Kirk, 2002: p75

<sup>36</sup> Kirk, 2002: p75

conveyed through human channels (2 Cor. 4:7). Human beings are immersed in culture and as such their cultures have influence on the communication of the gospel as well as their acceptance.

The biblical writers used culture to communicate the message and sometimes borrowed from other cultures (Babylonian sea monster Leviathan Ps. 104:26; Job 3:8; 41:1) God's covenant with his people reflects the form of the Hittite people's treaties with their vassel ..... more importantly is Paul used of philosophical and religious terms current in his time such as pleroma (fullness), apolutrosis (the redemption or emancipation of slaves) and kurios (lord, a title of dignity in the Greek Culture), filling them with new meaning in the light of Jesus Christ. Christ is born in a particular culture and raised in a particular culture and had some cultural attachment. "His birth was marked with ceremonies customary within his community; He was born a Jew not a kind of universal man."<sup>37</sup>

This means that though he is the Christ, yet he has his human affiliation tied to his Jewish culture in one way or the other.

### **2.2.3 Political Awareness**

Christians today tend to play a passive role when looking at the way governments and organizations run. In fact during the time of elections in Grand Bassa County, there is always an Episcopal Letter written to all churches urging them not to take part in politics but that they have the rights to vote. Pastors are most likely not allowed to run in any elections claiming that the church should leave politics to politicians. Walls and Ross wrote:

The church exist to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and it enter into saving activity of God as it engages holistically with the cares of life. Christ preached, but also healed people; he challenged the order of his day and he touched the lives of the unprivileged. So, scene through our teaching, we make the Christian feel that God cares for the things that vitally affects our daily lives.

---

<sup>37</sup> Kirk, 2005: p76

Christians in Congo, like Liberia were taught to be apolitical based on spirituality of separation, not transformation. It is very individualistic on personal sin and the spiritual journey to heaven rather than communal in concern for righteousness and justice.<sup>38</sup>

The church in Liberia frown on clergy person ascending to power of authority in government ignoring the fact that Walls and Ross highlighted, that “Social and political actions are integral to our Christian mission.”<sup>39</sup> Hence the church, following Jesus’ example, should be ready at all times to engage corrupt systems in order to transform them, heal and touch the daily lives of those they administered to. Anything on the contrary could leave its members finding an alternative which might not be in the interest of the Church. If the church should hold people responsible, people in authority to account, the church should also be ready to put some of those whom it has nurtured in position, especially those who have fear of God.

#### **2.2.4 Nurturing of the young converts**

With a good Sunday School program for children and adults, as well as well trained teachers, the nurturing of young converts is guaranteed. This is the most natural, non-threaten learning situation which is interactive for both young and old, whether in the church or house group setting. The benefits of such groups cannot be overemphasized. This has been the strategy employed with great successes in the new generation churches where a new comer is identified, befriend and immediately assigned to a small group that are best suited to the visitor’s neighbourhood and level of Christian understanding. Where confirmation classes are given the right

#### **2.2.5 The Church’s Response to Human Needs by loving Service**

When Jesus said that ‘To love God is to love your neighbor’ and that it was the greatest commandment, might have puzzled many people. Why cannot the great commission be the greatest commandment? Well, because loving God and neighbor encompasses everything. There are a lot to learn from this short phrase; what I gathered is that loving God and your neighbor will create in you a heart not to hurt God or your neighbor in any way. For

---

<sup>38</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p44

<sup>39</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p44-45

example, if I love my God, I will have no other gods beside Him or if I love my neighbor, I will not steal from him or her, neither will I hurt nor speak ill against them.

The past three decades, there has been a recovery of the holistic nature of the Gospel among the churches. These gatherings were held in various locations, contexts and time setting. The Lausanne Movement which started in 1974 under the banner, ‘the whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world’. In Malaysia in 1987, concerned activist, evangelicals, and charismatic formulated their understanding of holistic mission as ‘words, work and wonders.’ In 2001 at Oxford, 140 leaders of organizations working among the poor from 50 countries formed themselves into what is now known as the Micha Network and, under the immediate showdown of the September 11, 2001 bombings of the world trade center in the United States, came up with a declaration of ‘integral mission.’<sup>40</sup>

The essence of these gatherings were to find a way to transform the gospel from “saying it” to” doing it.” What interest me in these gatherings was the manner in which various church leaders and organizations sought to look at the gospel in a more holistic sense. That is, no longer letting the church play a passive role in issues that matters to the citizens of the world but playing an active role in making sure that they speak to the powers, to instill the rightful mechanism that will alleviate the major problems in the world such as poverty, diseases and the protection of human rights.

These gatherings were intended to be an eye opener for all Christian denominations in the world over judging from the crucial topic of the church’s response to human needs. How is the United Methodist Church in Liberia’s Grand Bassa County addressing the issue of human needs in line with their other Christian brothers in a bid to alleviate poverty will be examined and evaluated through the eyes of the people who lived in Grand Bassa County, Liberia. In chapter four of this document I will examine whether the church is catering for the holistic needs of the people of Grand Bassa County. But first, I would like to present Liberia, Grand Bassa County and the United Methodist in a historical prospective.

---

<sup>40</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p46

### 2.2.6 To seek to transform unjust structures of society

When going through and discussing the five marks of mission, one will find out that they are in some way interconnected. Much has been said about their integration and their specificity. Therefore when it comes to the fourth mark, we need to reaffirm integration. “The affirmation that we seek social transformation must be seen in the context of mission, and never as a long ranger.”<sup>41</sup> Walls and Rose wrote that:

The mission of the church must be holistic focusing on the *shalom* God provides for his human creation as well as for *his* whole creation. A shalom that is whole affecting and embracing all human life and all human beings. A shalom that reaches out to feelings, institutions, thoughts, and action. Reaches out to singing, laughing, crying and hoping. Reaches out to food, and hunger, water and thirst, fatigue and sleep. To nakedness and cloths, sickness and health, hopelessness and seed of hope. It’s shalom for everyone, to be experienced everywhere. It is a gift of shalom given by the God of love for to all and everyone. God shalom is not an individual gift, it’s a community gift.<sup>42</sup>

The gift should not be seen as individualistic rather a communal one. Walls and Ross wrote:

It relates to more than one person, one community, one clan, one language, one place; it is individual and collective, personal and community. They are integrated in God himself and it is impossible to look at one without focusing on the other.<sup>43</sup>

The first two marks go together and affirm that the message of the gospel must be lived out. It must be announced, embraced, nurtured and lived out in community:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

Walls and Ross wrote:

---

<sup>41</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p62

<sup>42</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p62

<sup>43</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p62-63



The Christian faith formats our understanding of life, gives us a perception of reality and a way to look at the world and into the future. It is not a theory, but a life sharing story that connects us to our life origin and purpose as well as to other, and the community of others. The Christian faith must be lived out and shared otherwise; it cannot be understood and embraced. The Christian faith needs to be nurtured or else, it will not grow. It needs to show its reality and significance by being lived out in the community that is a call to be no less than a sign of who God is and what he wants.<sup>44</sup>

The third mark of mission makes a beautiful transition between the *Kerygma*, the diakonia and the craving for justice.

- To respond to human need by loving service.

It is service of love expressed as an act of compassion. It is compassion motivated by the story and model of the Gospel as lived out in Jesus Christ. It is his compassion becoming an expression of the first fruit of God's desired justice for people, communities, and societies.<sup>45</sup>

It is service as an expression of thirst for justice, even becoming an announcement of the justice of the kingdom. A serving attitude is the Christian way of entering into the remaining two marks of mission. One is the search for transformation which denounces unjust structure and structures and announces God's Justice into our system and structures. The other one is the recognition of his creation and of the integrity of his creation, which is not a mere object of exploitation but is a sacred offer for us to have life with quality. It was created by him and must be managed by him.<sup>46</sup>

The remaining two marks of mission according to Walls and Ross are:

- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and renew the life of the earth.

---

<sup>44</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p63

<sup>45</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p63

<sup>46</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p 63

Wall and Ross wrote: “We affirm Justice is a fundamental expression of God’s search for transformation, as a mark of mission and the need to integrate it into our portfolio of mission.”<sup>47</sup>

### **2.2.7 To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth**

Creation is a symphony of material and life cycles empowered by Earth's star, the sun, whose energy drives global circulations of air and water--flows shaped by unequal heating and varied topography of land above and below the sea.<sup>48</sup>

Solar energy captured by green plants fuels molecule-to-molecule and organism-to-organism transfers, helping to weave Earth’s integrative bio-geographic and trophic fabric that interlaces all life. Its creatures produce and consume, multiply and diminish, develop and decompose, each with peculiar roles in sustaining biospheric integrity.<sup>49</sup>

This is Creation’s economic fabric—Creation’s Economy. “As we human creatures are part of this fabric we also are its stewards—stewards of this symphonic gift, stewards with divine appointments to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Unfolding in the canon of Scripture, vindicated in Christ’s resurrection, and celebrated in the Holy Eucharist, this economy is the comprehensive contemporary context of Christian mission.”<sup>50</sup>

Mission history often underplay the contribution of native Christians. In many cases, the local knowledge of habitants, ecosystems, and soil types were actually preserved rather than destroyed by mission, and particularly by local mission converts. For example, St. Joseph.

"Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man he had formed." (Genesis 2:8)

---

<sup>47</sup> Walls and Ross: 2008, p64

<sup>48</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p84

<sup>49</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p84

<sup>50</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p84

Evidently the world was in a wild, unrefined state when the first man was created. Although fully functioning ecosystems existed, to make it hospitable, some preparations were necessary. Once the man had been given a good start, care taking responsibilities were passed on to him, as plainly stated in verse (Genesis 2:15).<sup>51</sup>

The current series of ecological crisis – of which human-induced climate change is merely the most obvious - is causing mission not to react, but also to rethink at the deepest level. We lived in a world today where our interactions with nature are having a profound effect not just on our environment, but on us as the human species, such that they called everything we do in mission into question.

### **2.2.8 Degradation of the life of the earth**

The geographic distribution of plants and animals shows evident of displacement, reduction and extension by deforestation, putting lands into agriculture and urban expansion. Global climate change compels organism into new biogeographic pattern and relationship as they move towards poles into the highest attitude. Global climate change is driving plant and animals 3.8 miles per decades towards the pole. This is leading to fast extension of animals and plants. Human being will resolve to reserve habitat destruction and address global climate change.

The history of ocean fisheries shows that over-fishing and removal of filter feeder (oyster and clams), grazers (herbivorous fishes), and predators (carnivorous fishes) have restructured ocean food web. Preferential removal of the largest sea creatures from the top of the trophic level of the food web has cause smaller species to take the vacated top consumer role. As these in turn are over fished, or succumb to diseases from overcrowding, the next lower trophic level in line take place, spiralling the system downward toward ‘microbialization’.

Living creatures are based upon elements, carbon – their primary structural substance. In its oxidized form – carbon dioxide – it provides a basic raw material for photosynthesis, the process that produces fuel and building blocks for creating and multiplying living things and for transfers within tropic food web. Carbon is cycled within the biospheric fabric in producing and consuming, multiplying and diminishing, developing and decomposing.

---

<sup>51</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p88

Carbon is conserved and can be accounted for in ‘carbon budget’ within and among ‘reservoir’. Of four major reservoirs, the atmosphere, terrestrial biosphere, ocean and ocean sediments, the atmospheric reservoir shows a continuous rise in the carbon dioxide concentration. Loa, Hawaii shows a 21.6 per cent increase in the concentration between 1959 and 2007. The current atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are 27 percent higher than any point in the last 650, 000 years. Because carbon dioxide is a green house gas the increase portends a warming of the earth already underway. Immediate action is needed.

### **2.3 Historical background of the research**

Liberia, officially the Republic of Liberia, is a country in West Africa. It is bordered by Sierra Leone on the west, Guinea on the north and Côte d'Ivoire on the east.<sup>52</sup> Liberia's coastline is composed of mostly mangrove forests while the more sparsely populated inland consists of forests that open to a plateau of drier grasslands.

The country possesses 40% of the remaining Upper Guinean rainforest. Liberia has a hot equatorial climate, with significant rainfall during May to October, rainy season and harsh harmattan winds the remainder of the year.<sup>53</sup>

“Harmattan wind is a hot, dry wind that blows from the northeast or east in the Western Sahara and is strongest in late fall and winter (late November to mid-March). It usually carries large amounts of dust, which it transports hundreds of kilometres out over the Atlantic Ocean; the dust often make people to look very dry and dusty, sometimes very skilled. It often joke that the best time to select a life partner is during the harmattan because; one can easily determine the beauty of a person.

The harmattan is a trade wind strengthened by a low-pressure centre over the north coast of the Gulf of Guinea and a high-pressure centre located over north-western Africa in winter and over the adjacent Atlantic Ocean during other seasons. In the summer it is undercut by the cooler winds of the southwest monsoon, blowing in from the ocean; this forces the harmattan

---

<sup>52</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia>, accessed 25.06.2012

<sup>53</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia>, accessed 25.06.2012

to rise to an altitude of about 900 to 1,800 metres (about 3,000 to 6,000 feet). The interaction between the harmattan and the monsoon sometimes produces West African tornadoes.”<sup>54</sup>

Between April and mid September, the wind is so strong in the Edina area, it stirs up the combined flow of the Mechline, St. John and Benson Rivers, making it almost impossible to navigate.

Liberia covers an area of 111,369 km<sup>2</sup> (43,000 sq mi) and its population is about 3.7 million people. English is the official language, while over 30 indigenous languages are spoken within the country.<sup>55</sup>

Along with Ethiopia, Liberia is one of the two modern countries in Sub-Saharan Africa without roots in the European colonization of Africa. Beginning 1820, the region was colonized by freed American slaves with the help of the American Colonization Society, a private organization that believed ex-slaves would have greater freedom and equality in Africa. Slaves freed from slave ships were also sent there instead of being repatriated to their countries of origin.

In 1847, these colonists founded the Republic of Liberia, establishing a government model on that of the United States and naming the capital city Monrovia after James Monroe, the fifth president of the United States and a prominent supporter of the colonization.

“The True Weigh Party (TWP), founded in 1869, was the sole repository of political power in Liberia for over a century.”<sup>56</sup> “Its leadings members were without exception Christian fundamentalist, Americo-Liberian settler stock, conservative in their belief and relentless in their effort to build and maintain the privilege that they had fought to establish in their segregated colony.”<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255457/harmattan>, retrieved February 13, 2013

<sup>55</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia>, June 25, 2012

<sup>56</sup> Waugh Colin M. *Charles Taylor and Liberia Ambition and Atrocity in Africa's Lone Star State* Zed Book Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N19JF, UK and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA; 2012: p24

<sup>57</sup> Waugh;2011: p24

On April 12, 1980, a dramatic change of the patrimony of Americo-Liberian rule ended with the overthrow of President William Richard Tolbert and the True Weigh Party government. Tolbert himself was killed and a military government named and styled the “People Redemption Council” (PRC) was ushered into power.<sup>58</sup> The government was led by Master Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe as the head of state and was composed of seventeen enlisted men of the Arm Forces of Liberia (AFL).

A quick roundup of cabinet ministers, legislators and other government officials was made. Thirteen of those officials were executed publicly after being tried by a special military tribunal.<sup>59</sup>

The New government was made up of progressive and many were inducted into the army with ranks, this made them an easy target as anything that Doe saw as an act of undermining had grave consequences. Since they were militants, they could be tried before a military tribune that was normally set up by Doe and I believe depicted the verdict.

Although the PRC claimed it came to power because of rampant corruptions, nepotism and misuse of public office charges, the most serious message that came out of the new government was that the era of the Americo-Liberian domination was over and it was time for the indigenous to exercise power.<sup>60</sup>

The hope for a change for the better by the indigenous was short lived as the decades of the 1980s proved very stormy.

The coup d'état of April 12, 1980 led by Samuel Kanyon Doe, head of state and later president, ruled with such iron handedness that in some circles, the government was described as ranking worse than that of dictator Idi Amin who ruled Uganda in the 1970s.

---

<sup>58</sup> Waugh, 2011: p50; Kulah, 1999: p21

<sup>59</sup> Kulah Arthur F. *Liberia Will Rise Again, Reflection On The Liberian Civil Crisis*, Abingdon Press, Nashville P.O. Box 801, 201 Eighth Avenue South, Nashville Tennessee; 1999: p21

<sup>60</sup> Kulah, 1999: p22

Doe was not as educated, judging from his first address delivered to the nations but it seems that he was smart and out played the educated, professionals and politicians. By bringing most of the politicians and professionals that opposed the regime of President William R. Tolbert, Jr. and the political dominations, give him a breeding space to solidify his grip on power while he looked for his tribe's men to replace the coup maker and progressive.

After Samuel Kanyon Doe had solidified his grips on power, there were a lot of discontents even amongst the coup makers for the manner in which Doe was handling the country. It appears like one ethnic group wanted to exercise greater control over the others; when there were disagreements over policies, it was interpreted as undermining the interest of the government.

One by one Doe began eliminating high ranking members of the PRC who were accused of plotting coups and were subsequently executed. The most serious disagreement was between Doe, a Krahn from Grand Gedeh County, south-eastern and Thomas G. Quiwonkpa, a Gio from Nimba County in Northern Liberia.

The story that circulated was that Doe wanted to continue in power through elections, although the PRC had promised to turn the country to civilian rule after a period of military leadership.

As the story went around Liberia, Quiwonkpa encouraged Doe and the rest of the coup member to be faithful to the mandate of the coup; this was misunderstood by Doe as he saw Quiwonkpa as a potential threat to his government. Doe's reaction was drastic against the general as Kulah wrote: "Quiwonkpa was isolated, demoted in rank, and was sent to the Ministry of Defence as Chief of Staff of the Arm Forces of Liberia (AFL)."<sup>61</sup>

It seems like the action of demotion and isolation against Quiwonkpa was not enough, as Doe planned a suppression tactic on Quiwonkpa's ethnic group from every sector of the country.

In 1984, the Arm Forces of Liberia (AFL) staged an infamous act known as the "Nimba Raid" killing scores of people, burning villages, torturing others and forcing hundreds more to flee into exile including Quiwonkpa himself.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Kulah, 1999: p22

<sup>62</sup> Kulah, 1999: p23

The same year, Doe launched an attack on the University of Liberia, the training ground of the progressive who were increasingly opposed to the Doe's leadership. Some lecturers and students were arrested and imprisoned thus leaving the students to resist by staging a boycott of classes. The resistance anger Doe as Kulah wrote:

Doe ordered his Defence Minister Gray D. Allison to tell the students to move or be removed from the campus. This Arm Forces of Liberia did, resulting into rape, torture, arrest and even murder of students.<sup>63</sup>

After the killing of members of the Americo Liberian group and seizure of their property, Doe realized that members of the indigenous could not run the country alone; thus he invited members from the Americo Liberian group who were better trained to help in the running of the country.

Doe's government organized general and presidential elections in 1985 and the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) was organized. Relationship between the progressive and the military government had turned sour as most of those who supported Doe were fed up with his decisions especially, to run in the 1985 elections. The Election was the first of its kind held under the umbrella of a multiparty party system. Four political parties took part in the elections to include Samuel Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), the Liberia Action Party (LAP), the Liberia Unification Party (LUP) and the Unity Party (UP). Several opinion pools the Voice of America Nightline Africa at the time put Jackson Doe of the Liberia Action Party well ahead of Samuel Doe's NDPL with 60% of the total vote cast.

The actual results of the elections were unknown, following the day of voting Kulah wrote:

Liberia Television showed scenes of burned ballot papers and delayed return of ballot boxes. Some joked that the total number of votes exceeded the population of Liberia.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Kulah, 1999: p23

<sup>64</sup> Kulah, 1999: p24



At this point, I thought that the country was heading for some kind of instability but Doe had firm control over the military. Despite the electoral flaws, Doe was declared the winner. Though the elections process and results were not creditable yet, today, “some claimed that the major achievement of the coup was the introduction of multi party system, replacing it with the one party system that governed Liberia for over a century.”<sup>65</sup>

Due to the way Doe ruled the country, fear gripped many Liberians and made them flee into exile, including Doe’s former army Chief Thomas G. Quiwonkpa. The reasons for the overthrow of the government according to the coup leaders were amongst many rampant corruptions, nepotism and misuse of public office. But it seems that Doe and the coup makers were at each other for doing those very things or even worst for which the coup was carried out. The Samuel Kanyon Doe regime saw an even worst form of corruption, nepotism, tribalism and misuse of public office. Before the 1980 coup, hardly anything was know of the Krahn tribe in Liberia but by 1985, most of the top positions in the government were occupied by the Krahn. Samuel Doe put most of his brothers and tribes men in key positions of government including the military. This claimed the attention of not just the Doe’s allied, progressive but the coup maker themselves.

There were several revolts which led to several alleged failed coup during the decade of the 1980s with the bloodiest being 1985 when over 600 people were killed. Quiwonkpa, Doe’s commanding general, led a failed coup attempt that overthrows Samuel Doe on November 12, 1985 but, Doe regained power and Quiwonkpa was murdered along with hundreds of Liberians, who were still in a state jubilation on the streets of Monrovia and in other parts of the country when Doe regained state power.

In 1986, Samuel Kanyon Doe was sworn in as Liberia’s 20<sup>th</sup> president and the first president of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic.

The period 1986 to 1990 the government unleashed a reign of terror on the people of Liberia. Unwarranted arrests, detentions without trials, mysterious disappearance and gruesome deaths characterized the era.

---

<sup>65</sup> Kulah, 1999: p23

Many in Liberia felt that there was no one to speak to or seek or challenged the brutality and ironhandedness of the Doe regime not even the church. But on a rebuttal to this claim Kulah wrote: "Contrary to the belief of some that the church lost moral authority during the Doe's regime, the church remained the only morally authoritative voice."<sup>66</sup>

On December 24, 1989, a rumour of an attack by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) trickled into Monrovia from Butuo, from where the first offensive was launched. Many persons in Liberia expected that a civil war would have broken out in Liberia as far back as the 1980 or even 1947. However, what surprised most people were the intensity and cruelty shown by the Liberian in the war. Kulah wrote:

Liberians were considered peaceful and hospitable but their sadistic behavior shocked many in the world. It was equally surprising to realize that the ethnics were as deep as have been revealed.<sup>67</sup>

All doubts of an attack on Liberia were cleared when Charles Taylor confirmed the rumors and claimed the leadership of the NPFL to the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC). The government tried to allay the fear of the citizen by claiming that the uprising would be brought under control.

There were rapid advance of the rebels and frequent defeat of the government forces in rural areas reported by the local and international news outlets signal that the Doe government could not keep the rebels at bay. At that point, both Taylor and Doe accused each other of crimes committed and that Taylor was a fugitive wanted by the Liberian Government for embezzling millions of Dollars of Government funds and the United States of America for jail breaking; charges of which Taylor denied, claiming that Doe was fighting to damage his reputation.

---

<sup>66</sup> Kulah, 1999:p24

<sup>67</sup> Kulah, 1999: p18

Taylor being sensitive to the plight of the people of Nimba and the Americo-Liberians, traveled to areas where he met Liberian dissidents mainly from the mostly aggrieved groups who wanted to revenge on Doe and his government.

As the fighting raged, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) formed a military wing known as the “Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)” and sent it to Liberia to restore peace to the country. As the NPFL besieged the capital, “President Doe called on the West African Community to assist him to restore normality in his country.”<sup>68</sup>

The government of President Doe was clearly unpopular at home and was on the verge of military defeat by the insurgents. In addition, Doe himself was not on good terms with his neighbours, particularly Côte d’Ivoire, an influential country among Francophone members of the Community.

On the other hand, President Doe was a friend of General Ibrahim Babaginda, the president of Nigeria, the most powerful country in the Community.”<sup>69</sup> Taylor rejected the intervention of ECOMOG and launched an attack on them for invading the country. Being a conventional force, ECOMOG managed to land on the Liberian soil with the assistance of the INPFL on and Samuel Doe’s AFL on August 25, 1990. By that time Taylor’s forces, the NPFL had taken most parts of the country including large parts of the suburb of the capital Monrovia.

The entry of ECOMOG did not spare the life of Doe as he was captured on the ECOMOG military base at the Free Port of Monrovia with little or no resistance from the international intervention group on September 9, 1990 but by September 10, 1990 Doe was dead from wounds he sustained during his torture at the hands of Prince Johnson and his Independent National Patriotic Front (INPFL), a splinter group of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).

---

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/monographs/no44/ecomog.html>, accessed March 17, 2013

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/monographs/no44/ecomog.html>, accessed March 17, 2013

The death of Doe did not stop the war as it prolonged bringing about many splinter rebel factions, several peace talks and various interim governments, a special election was held in 1987 which Charles Taylor, won outright. Taylor's presidency was short lived as opposition from without and within pressured him from all sides. America and Great Britain imposed sanctions; embargo and travel restrictions on Charles Taylor and most of his government officials and rebels factions from within attacked him from all sides. Taylor himself was accused by the west of gun running and diamond smuggling and his involvement in the Sierra Leone civil war, all allegations Taylor denied.

In 2003 after fighting insurgency from Liberia United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), The Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and crippling sanctions from United States of America and Great Britain forced President Taylor to resign on August 11, 2003, surrendering power to his vice president, Moses Blah.

The resignations paved the way for general and presidential elections that took place on October 11, 2005. The Elections were won by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP) following a run-off with a former football star, George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). In 2011, Madam Johnson Sirleaf won her second and final term after a controversial run-off with the congress of Democratic Change held on 11 October 2011, with a presidential runoff election held on 8 November 2011. Sirleaf was awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, jointly with Leymah Gbowee of Liberia and Tawakel Karman of Yemen. One of the major promises by the Ellen Johnson Government was to rate Liberia of corruption, nepotism and tribalism normally referred to as business as usual. However, this dream has become a nightmare since most of her government officials had been accused of stealing millions with little or no steps taking to bring them to justice but, rather shift them to bigger positions in her government.

The women were recognized "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work.

### 2.3.1 Grand Bassa County

Grand Bassa is one of Liberia's 15 political sub-divisions, situated in the west-central portion of the country. The county measures an area of 7,936 square kilometers (3,064 sq mi). As of the 2008 Census,<sup>70</sup> the population of Grand Bassa County was estimated at about 224,839, making it the fifth most populous county in Liberia.<sup>71</sup>

It is divided into eight political districts and three cities. It has a long coast line, sandy beaches, mangrove swamps and tropical rain forest. The people of Grand Bassa County are very religious, with a high proliferation of church in almost in every corner of county. Grand Bassa County was one of the original signers of the constitution and the declaration of independence of Liberia along with Montserrado and Sinoe on July 26, 1847.

The Grand Bassa County is headed by a superintendent who is appointed by the president of Liberia to serve as the president's representative and in most cases accountable to the President and not to the people whom they governed. Before the Ellen Johnson administration, city mayor, town, clan, and paramount Chiefs were elected, because of lack of funds for the holding of said election, the national legislature suspended that part of the constitution and giving the president the power to appoint. The county is represented by 2 senators and five representatives in the Liberian National Legislature.

### 2.3.2 The United Methodist Church in Liberia

The United Methodist church is one of the largest mainstream denominations in Liberia. Methodism in Liberia is as old as Liberia itself.<sup>72</sup> Starr Fredrick wrote: "The Liberian Mission is the first foreign mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church."<sup>73</sup> "The Methodist Episcopal denomination (The United Methodist Church) entered Liberia in 1832"<sup>74</sup> and has continued in its active work until today. Methodist and Baptist jointly share the honor of having been among the original settlers to arrive in Liberia and provide outstanding leadership.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *National Population and Housing Census preliminary Results 2008*: pp10-14

<sup>71</sup> -- *Census 2008* : pp10-14

<sup>72</sup> Cox, Lamark J. *Hand Book for Conference, District and Local Church Leaders of The Liberia Annual Conference UMC*; SCP Third World Literature Publishing House, Lithonia, Georgia 30058, USA 1994: p5

<sup>73</sup> Starr Fredrick, *Liberia Description History Problems*; Biblio Life, LLC, Chicago 1913: p33

<sup>74</sup> Starr, 1913: p32

<sup>75</sup> Cox, 1994 :p7

The first Methodist Missionary to arrive in Liberia in 1833 was Rev. Melvin B. Cox, who helped stabilize the Methodist work and brought it under the Episcopal supervision of the Church in America. On April 6, 1833, Rev. Cox held the first camp meeting with the Liberian United Methodist and John B. Penny of the Presbyterian Church at Lower Caldwell, St. Paul River District. The following years, the UMC kept her proclamation and evangelism ministries going, spreading throughout the country. Advancement in teaching and pastor schools for the greater task of church planting in the interior took place making Liberia to be large enough for the establishment of an Annual Conference.

In 1964, the General Conference voted to allow Liberia to become a self governed Annual Conference of its own.

In February 1965 the Liberia Annual Conference convened at Seys United Methodist Church Careysburg, Montserrado County and unanimously voted to establish a Central Conference and to elect a Liberian Bishop.<sup>76</sup>

The dream of electing the first United Methodist Church bishop was to replace missionary bishops who were appointed by the General Board of Global Ministries was achieved, thus:

On December 8-12, 1965 at the Mount Scott United Methodist Church in Harper, Cape Palmas District Maryland County, the first Liberian Bishop, Stephen Trowen Nagbe, Sr. was elected and consecrated.<sup>77</sup>

Bishop Nagbe served until his death in February 1973. Since then, three Liberian born bishops have been elected and consecrated to include Bishop Bennie D. Warner, Bishop Arthur Flomo Kulah and incumbent Bishop John G. Innis.

These Liberian bishops have played a major role in the expansion mission of the church, have upheld it to conform to the global Christian mission. The proclamation of the Gospel is an

---

<sup>76</sup>Cox, 1994:p8

<sup>77</sup>Cox, 1994:p8

ongoing process that is evident by the number of new churches and districts springing up all over the country and the expansion of nurturing programs through the church school, youth and young adult, women and organizations.

Schools and clinics were erected in most parts of Grand Bassa County. Other programs aimed at nurturing women are referred to as the United Methodist Young Women Network. In this group, women are taught their basic rights and are empowered to face the harsh realities of life amidst the difficult economic situation of Liberia.

During the war, shelters were provided to thousands of displaced people at various United Methodist facilities in Buchanan and the Camphor United Methodist Church Mission Station, in District #3 Grand Bassa County. Trees were planted on most of the church property and facilities such as schools, clinics and the headquarters of the church itself, with the aim of appreciating God's creation. These programs and activities correspond with the five marks of mission as indicated by Walls and Ross.

### **3 Research Methodology**

In this chapter, I will be unveiling the Method employed in this research, presenting the sample of the research as well as presenting the clue for the data analysis and the retrospective overview of the field in Liberia.

#### **3.1 The Method Used**

The approach to this study is of a qualitative character, where semi-structured interviews were conducted on a sample of people. In addition to completing interviews with selected Methodist and non-Methodist, politicians in their capacity as politicians, a victim of culture practices and a traditionalist on how they understood United Methodist Church in light of transformational mission. The answer to the research question was sought through interviews with church workers, church members both laity and clergy, non-Methodist, local politicians and informal conversations with few people as well as observation of few of the mission field and documents gathered from the United Methodist Church Office, books and internet websites.

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. I was able to initiate the conversation towards answering of the research question, having prepared certain topics based on the five marks of mission while still being flexible to shift focus when needed.

The structure of the interview unfolded itself as they were conducted. Using this approach, I wished to obtain in-depth stories that would highlight the research topic from different perspectives.

I want to explore transformation as it regards the work of the UMC in the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County from the interviewee's perspectives, but with a link to the five marks of mission of Walls and Ross.

Qualitative research is a kind of scientific research that seeks to systematically answer a question using a set of predefined procedures. It collects evidence, produces findings that were not determined in advance and the said findings produced are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study. Additionally, Qualitative research seeks to understand a



given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of particular populations.”<sup>78</sup>

Qualitative research usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy it is inductive, constructionist and interpretive, but qualitative researchers do not always subscribe to all three of their futures.

I also considered the semi-structured in-depth interviews as relevant in order to have direct contact with the respondents. The Semi-structured- interviews enabled me to analyse the responses carefully, in light of both verbal and non-verbal responses.

Semi-Structured Interview typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in a general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview scheduled. Also the interviewer usually has some leeway to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.<sup>79</sup>

The justification for doing an empirical study is the desire to illustrate with specific examples; I will be able to do a study on transformation of the lives of a group of people such as the people of Bassa. In relation to the mission work of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, nothing has been published on the perspective of how people view the church. The research’s aim was to collect firsthand information from people whom in one way or the other are able to identify the UMC’s role in transforming the lives of people, believing this to make a contribution to the broader topic of transformation from a more practical point of view of mission in such a case.

An instrumental case study is the study of a case (e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organization) to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or

---

1. <http://www.fhi360.org/nr/rdonlyres/et17vogszehu5s4stpzb3tyqlpp7rojv4waq37elpbyei3tgmc4ty6dunbccfzxtaj2rvbaubzmz4f/overview1.pdf>: November 12, 2012

<sup>79</sup> Bryman Alan, *Social Research Method 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York: p716

build theory. In instrumental case research the case facilitates understanding of something else.

Robert Stake classified cases into three categories: (1) intrinsic, (2) instrumental, and (3) collective. The intrinsic case is often exploratory in nature, and the researcher is guided by his or her interest in the case itself rather than in extending theory or generalizing across cases. In an instrumental case study the case itself is secondary to understanding a particular phenomenon.<sup>80</sup>

I will as far as possible give a clear possible description of the methodology of the research, both the planning and implementation of the project, so that others may evaluate the validity of the research. This creates the foundation for an analytic generalization. I believe that the result may serve as a pointer of certain honest trends. Based on the findings, I will come up with a generalized conclusion. The presentation of method and the argument will give the reader an opportunity to depict his or her own conclusion.

### **3.2 Identification of population and sample**

A sample of 15 was the aim from four groups across Grand Bassa County. However, due to various factors, the sample size was reduced to 12, drawn from five of the eight districts of Grand Bassa County. The respondents were between the ages of 23 to 84 years. The respondents were mostly members of various churches but with different levels of participation, and a traditionalist. Most of the samples were recommended to me by people who have a worthy experience in the mission field and I personally selected some of whom I knew of their knowledge in the field.

In order to get information on how the church is dealing with the issue of transformation, I had to deal with key church officials from national and local levels. I did not disclose the research topic to them before hand because I wanted a reliable piece of information and did not want previous knowledge of the topic to inter-play on their responses.

---

<sup>80</sup> <http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/casestudy/n175.xml>, November 12, 2012

### **3.3 Field Research Instruments**

As this is a qualitative study, I had been the main instrument in collecting data. For the interview with a traditionalist, a local person helped me to translate the interview guide and assisted me to understand the cultural code especially when it came to cultural issues such as Female Genital Mutilation and sex, which is something that you do not normally express in clear words before elders.

The interviews were done in diverse places, under isolated thatched kitchens, in offices and in the church buildings and living rooms depending on the preference of the interviewee. People were told that there were interviews going on and that no one was allowed to enter the premises of the interview. However, some of the interviews were disrupted with cell phone calls and we had to pause to turn the phone off. Transcriptions were done shortly after each interview took place.

Because the interviews were semi-structured, I went with a set of topics to be covered, and also with a number of formulated questions that were meant to assist in case the conversation needed a push. The interview guide was not binding and I sought to keep the conversations as flexible as possible.

The respondents were encouraged to give a narrative of their knowledge of the topic and were given the chance to speak freely even at times when I felt that they were going out of track. This brought about information that was important in the eyes of the interviewees, providing their own description of their understanding of the topic, which was of interest to the research.

### **3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation**

As this is a qualitative study, the data was analysed continuously while still in the field. At the end of the field work, I did a content analysis of the responses from the semi-structured interviews. The interview, after being transcribed, was coded into various topics such as transformation through education, transformation through health care, transformation through advocacy, among others.

It is difficult to measure transformation, since it entail first of all transforming first the individual and then structure or situation but it can be seen over a period of time, thus this study has limitation. The role of the church can be measured by the kind of impact it is making on both the individual and communal lives. However, the aim of the study is not concerned with the process of transformation, rather the impact of the transformation.

I consider it expedient to present the results of the research thematically. Through this, in-depth perspective of the respondent will be presented adequately.

### **3.5 Retrospective Reflections on the field**

The sample consisted of twelve respondents from five of the eight political districts of Grand Bassa County and various ages and sexes. Some of them were prominent Bassa personalities who are key church figures and working at the church office in Monrovia.

The respondents were members of different churches and districts of the UMC and other denominations. The sample took into consideration laity and clergy, politicians and traditionalist. Most of the interviews were arranged before I arrived at the scene of the field work. In the case of the traditionalist, it was difficult to pre-arrange the interview; however, a gate keeper had to lead me through the process.

The interviews were conducted within the time frame of 45mins to one hour, based on the interviewee's knowledge of the topic. I considered it enough time to cover the subjects of interest, while having enough time to go in-depth, and still being realistic with regards to the capacity of analysing the data after ended field work.

The preparation for field work consisted of familiarizing with relevant literature. I also conducted a pilot interview with a master's student in Liberia, in order to get a feeling of the role of an interviewer, especially considering that the interviews would possibly raise eyebrows when talking about the churches' role in cultural related topics. The experience of carrying out interviews for research was very new to me compared to talking to people from both sides of the cultural divide.

As I come from this part of the country and knowing how people perceived the idea of mentioning culture issues such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sex and polygamy, scared me a whole lot and had to pray for the confidence to go ahead and deal with the subject matter.

Since dealing with culture issues was a very serious issue, my focus was to establish rapport with the respondents, so that it will be possible to get beyond the polite conversation when doing interviews.<sup>81</sup> I had to consult others who knew how to approach people especially in the traditional settings on the subjects of sex, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or polygamous attitudes. This helped me to set my contextual agenda and humble myself in a way that I obtained the loyalty and friendliness of the respondents.

---

<sup>81</sup> Ryen Anne, "Cross-Culture Interviewing", 377.

## 4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter, I will give an analytical presentation of the findings from the field in Grand Bassa County, Liberia as it relates to the research question, “To what degree do people in Grand Bassa County in Liberia think that the United Methodist Church has participated in the transformation of life in the County?”

The responses from the interview have been categorized in various topics, namely:

- Transformation through Proclamation
- Baptisming and Nurturing
- Speaking for the poor and against social structural injustice in Liberia
- Response to Human Need by Loving service (education, health, sanitation, road construction
- Sustaining the earth.

The church’s role and its significance in transforming the lives of the people of Bassa according to the main objectives for this study. The information was obtained from Grand Bassa County through interviews and conversations. Some of the interview materials are kept in the language of the interviewee so that their thoughts would not be distorted and misplaced. In addition, there will material from the church office, informal conversations, and literature and internet websites. The sum of the interviews, literature, Internet websites and observations on the field will serve as the basis for analysis.

The names of people interviewed are completely fictitious and is in no way connected to any individual. This is done in order to hide the identity of the interviewees and respondents in this research. The respondents are arranged in no special order, thus making distinction among them. The interviewees are clergy, laity and government officials in their capacity as government but, could be a clergy person or a lay person, Methodist and non-Methodist as well a Traditionalist.

#### 4.1 Transformation through Proclamation of the Word:

Walls and Ross define proclamation as a mark of mission as “is a formal public announcement ...”<sup>82</sup> Or “the act of proclaiming”<sup>83</sup> on the topic of proclamation as a mark of the church, Walls and Ross highlighted that: “Jesus began his ministry proclaiming, “The kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15).<sup>84</sup> The good news of the Kingdom was declared by a special anointing: “The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18).<sup>85</sup> More than two thousand years later, these themes continue to make their impact, calling for renewed commitment for the church. Walls and Ross highlighted that people today see proclamation in two ways. As we face our current context of increasing pressure in religious fundamentalism naming confrontational kind of proclamation that is “the true preaching of the Gospel while others have seen the power of different creative presentation.”<sup>86</sup> Walls and Ross argued that: “Whatever style we employed, there are some basic attitudinal problems we need to eliminate, which we suggest as condemnation and arrogance.”<sup>87</sup>

Walls and Ross wrote that: Proclamation in biblical sense refers to “a messenger conveying an important message which has been given to him either orally or in writing.”<sup>88</sup> Further emphasizing the model of proclamation, Walls and Ross noted the varieties of different ways that proclamation has been carried out from various perspectives of the apostles proclaiming. They wrote:

Luke’s and Paul’s use of the word range from merely informing to the more significant giving an important report (Acts 14:27; 15:4) or as a command (Acts 17:20). There is also a sense of proclaiming or declaring (Acts 4:2; 13:5; 26:20). John uses the word exclusively in theological sense, leaving some scholars to believe that John’s is a realized eschatology in the present, in contracts to the proclamation of the age of salvation, the heralding of a coming event.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Walls and Ross:,2008:p 3

<sup>83</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/proclamation>, accessed April 28, 2013

<sup>84</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p3

<sup>85</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008; p 3

<sup>86</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p3

<sup>87</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p40

<sup>88</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p3

<sup>89</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p3

Proclamation did not acquire any particular form and hence I will need to draw all the significant varied perspectives that are presented. The point to take note of is that there was no fixed method of proclaiming what is important in that Jesus' church was and still should be our aim of proclaiming though in diverse, sometimes hostile contexts.

There is no fixed format or tried and tested formula that must be prescribed for all contexts. We proclaimed Christ but our methods and the application of the good news will vary from context to context depending on the situation.

Does this apply to all people in the world? How do the people of Bassa see this mark of mission in light of Walls and Ross? Nelly Julia, an interviewee said that:

The United Methodist Church Liberia in general and Grand Bassa County in particular is proclaiming the gospel, and it is the mission of the United Methodist Church to proclaim the Gospel and make disciple for the transformation of the world, a world that Grand Bassa County is a part.<sup>90</sup> John Simo added his voice to Nelly Julia's by saying that:

The United Methodist Church in Liberia is proclaiming the gospel and is bringing the people to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. However, people should be aware that proclamation is not condemning people in authority but dialoguing with them when there is a problem and that the UMC is taking an approach in proclamation that is more of a dialogue than condemnation.<sup>91</sup>

However, Koko J. sees a contrary view and will like to see the United Methodist Church condemning the ills in Liberia and Grand Bassa County. Koko J lamented that:

Proclamation is preaching the words as well as confronting and publicly condemning the ills in society; as the way the church should go in promoting the interests of the people and spreading the Gospel of love.<sup>92</sup>

For Jonathan Day, proclamation is all about showing God's Love, he said that:

---

<sup>90</sup> Nelly Julia, interviewed July 29, 2012

<sup>91</sup> John Simo, Interviewed August 15, 2012

<sup>92</sup> Koko J., 2012



The United Methodist Church is proclaiming the Gospel in many ways. The gospel has been proclaimed both in words and deeds. The UMC proclaims and calls people to repent, accepting that Jesus Christ died for their sins and that they should live a Godly life. But at the same time the United Methodist Church demonstrates in practical terms the preached message, that is, when the UMC proclaims that Jesus love you, that message does not end there. The church proves the love by provision of education to liberate the people of Grand Bassa County out of illiteracy and bring that community out of extreme poverty. When we proclaim that Jesus loves you but the people are sick and there is no clinic, we tell them here is a clinic to heal you from your illness, Jesus loves you and here is a hand pump so that you and your children can drink clean water, Jesus loves you, we are connecting your road so that you can be able to send your farm produce to town so that you can have a better earning.<sup>93</sup>

On the topic of whether the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County is proclaiming the Gospel, Nelly Julia had to say:

Yes, the church is proclaiming the Gospel and in fact it is the first and foremost mission obligation of the church. Through proclamation of the word, lives are being transformed and great things are taking place.

For Carlo, she was very stern in her voice as she said: “Oh! Yes, yes the church is proclaiming the gospel and it is evident by the number of churches that we have all around the Grand Bassa County.”<sup>94</sup>

Baryougar also acknowledge that: “The church is preaching the Gospel and it is one of the biggest churches in grand Bassa County.”<sup>95</sup>

Zoemah said that “the church is actually preaching the Gospel; rain or shine the United Methodist church doors are open to preach the words.”<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Day, 2012

<sup>94</sup> Carol 2012

<sup>95</sup> Baryougar, 2012

Spilo, “the United Methodist Church is not just preaching the Gospel, but is leading the road for others to follows.”<sup>97</sup>

Further commenting on the method of proclamation employed by the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, John Simo asserted that:

The prophets did not just condemn but also gave solutions to the problems faced by the nation that is why the United Methodist Church is proclaiming the gospel. It is engaging people in a way that will make them understand the life situation of the people, what the people are complaining about and settle for the best solution. My belief and approach is dialogue rather than condemnation or confrontation and arrogance.<sup>98</sup>

All of the interviewees agreed that the UMC is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in Grand Bassa County.

The reports of the District Superintendents of districts located in Grand Bassa County have documented evidence of new churches being planted in County by both St. John River and Grand Bassa Districts of the United Methodist Church. Coupled with elaborate worship services, rising membership and church expansion leaves one to conclude without doubts that United Methodist Church is proclaiming the word, and that spiritual and physical transformation is taking place in the lives of the people of Bassa.

The reports further explain that through proclamation, new members are being received in the church by their own profession of faith and or joining from other faith to the United Methodist faith. To get an appreciation of this statement, the UMC Grand Bassa and St. John River Districts combined have, by the time of the writing of this report, “a total membership of 12, 952 inclusive of men, women youth, young adults and children.”<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Zoemah, 2012

<sup>97</sup> Spilo, 2012

<sup>98</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>99</sup> Districts Superintendents reports of the Grand Bassa and St. John River Districts

However, the membership of the United Methodist Church concentrated in Grand Bassa County is much higher than what is actually reflected in the reports of the District Superintendents of Grand Bassa and St. John River Districts owing to the fact that some of the churches located in Grand Bassa County were placed under the Kakata Farmington River District by the Liberia Annual Conference.

There is a serious debate of how proclamation should be carried out in Grand Bassa County, while others are just saying that the church is preaching and building new churches and getting rapid expansion in membership. There are some with a bigger and deeper ambition for the church in the process of proclaiming the gospel.

Some believe that it is only the confrontational kind of proclamation that is true preaching of the Gospel. (This is clearly shown in the case of Koko J. that “confrontation and public condemnation is the best way to proclaim the gospel; something that John Simo opposed citing, “dialogue and pointing out the wrong to the leaders of the county and nation as the way forward.) Whatever way the Gospel is proclaimed, the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County has to be aware in resolving emerging social conflicts.

Whatever the style we employed, there are some attitudinal problems as Walls and Ross clearly stated as “condemnation and arrogance,” that we will need to eliminate in our quest to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What should be proclaimed? Looking at Luke’s account, a powerful declaration is noted – The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of the sight of the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, (Luke 4:18-19). The reference to Isaiah link Jesus and his ministry to the fulfillment of what the prophet had envisioned. Jesus is here taking on himself the role of ‘the servant’ for which he is being filled with the power of the spirit.

The people of Bassa believe that the United Methodist Church is proclaiming the Gospel to the poor, the needy, the prisoners, the dumb, and the blind but differs in the manner in which it is being proclaimed. As Walls and Ross rightly put it, proclamation is not a one way street

in Grand Bassa County. All of the interviewees have a common agreement that the church is participating in the transformation of the lives of the people through the proclamation of the word. However, there is a variance in the methods and format of proclamation.

For some such as Koko J, proclamation should be confrontational and public condemnation. In other words, when you condemn publicly, the people will see that you are speaking in their interest as their spiritual leader. But for John Simo, proclamation is about pointing out the wrong in secretly confronting and dialoguing county and national leaders instead of being seen unprophetic.

However, for Jonathan Day, proclamation is about providing some social service, what he termed as proclaiming in deeds and not in words only. For the rest of the interviewees, the church is proclaiming and winning souls for Christ. As Walls and Ross indicated that the marks of mission are integrated thus Jonathan Day is directly connecting the United Methodist Church strategy of proclamation to the first and fourth marks of mission according to Walls and Ross. For John Simo, he sees proclamation from the second point of Walls and Ross, he stressed that: dialogue rather than condemnation.

In whatever fashion one might proclaim the Gospel, the main intend of the message is to win soul for Jesus Christ and to initiate them into the church of Christ in a process of what Walls and Ross will call Baptism, teaching and nurturing.

## **4.2 Baptism, Teaching and Nurturing**

The importance of Baptism Teaching and Nurturing is the nucleus of the Christian faith. These three components of a Christian life welcome them into the faith, enlighten them on how to live the Christian life and keep them intact to the faith.

### **4.2.1 Baptism**

The ticket of gaining accesses into the membership of the church is through baptism. According to Walls and Ross:

Baptism brings believers into membership of the church and it is the primary sacrament which marks us as Christians; it is the common bond for all Christians across the world and it is the basis for communion.<sup>100</sup>

Wall and Ross further explain that:

By one spirit we are all baptized into one body. This gives our ecclesiological significance to baptism as the instrument of our incorporation into Christ's messianic office as our Prophetic, Priest, and King; an incorporation which qualifies us to carry out prophetic, Priestly and royal functions in the church. It is a communion between Christians in the hierarchical, corporate, and communal basis, with involvement both of laity and clergy in church government<sup>101</sup>

Wall and Ross went on to quote Paul Avis as saying that:

... the church is founded on our initiation in Christ by the baptism on confession of the fundamental baptismal faith. It holds Christ, the Christians, and the church together. Baptism brings us into a union with Christ and the union in the church.<sup>102</sup>

As a mark of the church Mission, Walls and Ross demonstrate how Baptism is central for the initiation of new believers into the family union with Jesus Christ and the Church by adding that:

Baptism brings believers into membership of the body of the church. Our foundational unity with each other and with all fellow Christians is rooted in our baptism in Christ. As our primary sacrament which makes us as Christians, baptism is the common bond for all Christians across the world.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p40

<sup>101</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p40

<sup>102</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p40

<sup>103</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p40

The mission of the United Methodist Church in the process of transforming lives in Grand Bassa County, uses as a key obligation to evangelize, win souls and baptize the newly won teach and nurture them. Nelly Julia said that:

The Mission of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Grand Bassa County is actually to make disciples for Jesus Christ. That is the total mission of the church in Liberia as a whole. By evangelism baptizing and nurturing new converts and continuing the nurturing the various organizations as as the church school, children ministry, youth fellowship, young adult fellowship, men and women organizations. We also carry out door to door evangelism and then we also evangelize through the building of hospital because it is from the hospital the people get to know the church and get interested in the church work of the church. When the people accept the faith, we baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>104</sup>

Like Walls and Ross, Carol said that:

After a convert has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and confess with his mouth that Jesus die for his sin and is willing and ready to live according to the Christian ethics and teachings, we baptize them, but after baptism, it is where your real Christian life starts and that is what we call the teaching and nurturing process, it is very important for the Christian.<sup>105</sup>

Abago a non – Methodist said that:

As I told you, I am not a Methodist but I know that the Methodist people baptize their members, I know because as I said before, the United Methodist Church was our first church and this was something practice during the missionary time and still is today. It is an important sacrament for the not just the UMC but for all churches that are consider to be following the example of Christ.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Nelly Julia, July 29, 2012

<sup>105</sup> Carol, 2012

<sup>106</sup> Abago, 2012

Spilo said that: "I that what makes you and myself to be brother in the Christian faith is our baptism and we need to cherish it until God calls us home."<sup>107</sup> Joshua Smith said that: Oh! Yes, the United Methodist Church does baptize their members and I think in most of the church around here, if you are not a baptize member, you cannot take communion and in fact, you are not consider to be a full member, that means if something happens to you, the church is not responsible for you as compare to baptized believers.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism defines baptism as "the initiatory sacrament which enters us into covenant with God"<sup>108</sup> Wesley, however, views baptism as "a sign of the covenant which God has given to us through Christ,"<sup>109</sup> The baptismal sacrament, Wesley observes, is ministered to "the proper subject by means of water."<sup>110</sup> Wesley reaches this conclusion by Biblical tradition which clearly shows the use of water in all baptisms, and from a consideration of water itself, which he states, "has a natural power of cleansing."<sup>111</sup> The water, Wesley notes, is administered by "washing, dipping, or sprinkling."<sup>112</sup> He hastens to add that there is no Biblical precept for one of these methods. And, he reasons that "there is no express meaning in the word "baptize" in scripture that would mandate a particular method upon us."<sup>113</sup>

This is understood as Wesley observes how the word "baptism" is used to describe the cleaning of pots, cups and beds (Mark 7:4). Wesley argues that "while a pot and cup might be immersed or dipped in water to be cleaned, it is unreasonable to assume that beds are cleansed in the same manner."<sup>114</sup>

The Christians mandate to baptise was given by Jesus Christ himself as stated in the gospel:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them

---

<sup>107</sup> Spilo, 2012

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

<sup>111</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed April 21, 2013

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

In the United Methodist Church in Edina, it is interesting how baptismal ceremony is carried out. There will be a lot of people from the church and visiting churches that will come to join in the celebration of the initiation. A whole night of prayer service and tarry is held with singing and praising God; by 6:00 a.m., the converts are taken to the river where the candidates will be baptized.

In the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, baptism is the only way of gaining full membership into the fellowship of Methodist believers. Before one can participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion in the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, that member must be a baptized believer.

Baptism brings the member into the fellowship of the Christian faith, I considered it as a passport that unites the baptized believers both into the union with Christ and the Church. This does not mean to say that one who is not baptized cannot connect to Christ rather as John Wesley will put, it is the outward sign of the inward grace. But how do we maintain a new baptized believer in the fellowship with Christ and the Church? This brings me to what Walls and Ross will call nurturing.

#### **4.2.2 Teaching and Nurturing**

Teaching and nurturing people in the things of God are key to the Christian life and leads a Christian into understanding the faith. Walls and Ross wrote:

The Great Commission conceived discipleship to be the end product and natural outcome of global evangelization. And the medium of this lifelong transformation of converts is teaching – not by human wisdom or knowledge, but rather ‘teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you’. The divine priority giving to teaching makes discipleship imperative



for all who respond to the proclamation of the Gospel. The authority behind what is taught is not merely human but divine.<sup>115</sup>

Walls and Ross further wrote that:

The most important transformation one may receive is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ Jesus; as we get closer to him through our prayers, the word and obedience to the word and becoming intimate with him. Our highest calling is to become Christ like. It is by far the most fulfilling achievement both for us and before God.<sup>116</sup>

Laying emphasis on the need for a strong biblical conviction in nurturing new converts, Walls and Ross wrote:

Christianity that lacks a strong and clear biblical conviction which produces godly character will find little use both to the lord and to the needy world. When young converts are not properly and steadily nurtured (sometimes exclusively), they become like abandoned babies.<sup>117</sup>

The aim of all of the teachings and nurturing is to allow the church to conform to the principle of Christian ethics, thereby transforming them into being obedience to authority. Most of the interviewees stressed the importance of “Theological Education by extension which provides an opportunity for nurturing the Christian in all of the United Methodist local churches. John Simo said that:

Teaching and nurturing for the United Methodist Church is key because if you do not teach the people you leave them vulnerable and when you do not nurture them they will begin to backslide this is why the UMC has the church school, and all of the

---

<sup>115</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p25

<sup>116</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p25

<sup>117</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p25

different fellowships and organizations that continue the process of teaching and nurturing of the member.<sup>118</sup>

Koko J said that:

The United Methodist Church emphasizes teaching and nurturing our members. Because of the strong emphasis we place on teaching and nurturing it is why the UMC has a whole department of Christian education that is doing extremely well monitoring the various church schools from the Local to the District and organize program that inspired the members. The Church is transforming new believers through our teaching program.<sup>119</sup>

Fredhouse and the other interviewees are happy with the level of “the Annual Conference Lay pastors and Lay-speakers program that is providing education and nurturing pastors and lay-speakers who- in return nurtures the local churches that do not have theological graduates. Jueh Ceeagar said that:

The United Methodist Church in Liberia, unlike many other churches and denominations, is blessed with well trained theologians who are running these bi-annual weekly seminars and workshops which are very fundamental for teaching and nurturing the church in the things of God.<sup>120</sup>

Most of the interviewees stressed that “Youth Fellowship, Young Adult Fellowship, Men and Women fellowships are all fellowships and organizations that keep on teaching and nurturing the church.” All of the United Methodist and Non-Methodist that have visited the United Methodist Church also commented on the conducting of regular Bible studies and prayer meetings aimed at keeping the members in tune to the things of God.

---

<sup>118</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>119</sup> Koko J. 2012

<sup>120</sup> Jueh Ceeagar, Interviewed August 10, 2012

In these organizations and fellowships, members are taught the basis of Christian ethics which is not just important for their living but for preparing them for the world in the valley.<sup>121</sup>

These organizations do not only teach people about the basis of Christian ethics and preparing them for the life in the valley, but also to cement personal unity among their members and to teach them about obedience to authority.

Obedience to authority is inculcated within the African Cultures. Authority is conveyed from top to bottom. One standing above the recipient in the hierarchy of leadership is superior and this gives him the right to be obeyed by those below the ladder as his subordinates.

John Simo Also emphasized that “it is scriptural to obey authority”<sup>122</sup> But Aloysius Toe refutes this kind of obedience and warns against the obedience placing reliance on Romans 13:1, “All authority is from God and must be obeyed,” church leaders stress unquestionably blind loyalty even to evil regimes. They admonish members to forget about the reality of their daily lives and obey their political leaders who by their actions are the cause for most human sufferings.

Citing Isaiah 61:1-2, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release to the prisoners. By healing the broken hearted, Toe elaborated that:

God wants the Church to raise its voice against those who produce and reproduce poverty and keep his people hungry and sick. By proclaiming freedom for the captives and liberty to prisoners, God wants the Church to publicly denounce and take action in the interest of those unjustly detained and

---

<sup>121</sup> Carol, 2012

<sup>122</sup> John, 2012

languishing in unfavourable jail cells. God wants the Church to walk the streets in protest.<sup>123</sup>

As a means to widen the ministry of teaching and nurturing in Grand Bassa County, Nelly Wright wrote: “the UMC provided 1,500 Bibles to non- United Methodist Churches in and around the City of Buchanan.”<sup>124</sup>

Most of the interviewees acknowledged that the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County is carrying out nurturing through the many programs that are in place from local, district, and conference levels such as: The Church School Program, the Children Ministry, Youth and Young Adult Fellowships, The Young Women Network, Men and Women’s Organization.

### **4.3 Speaking for the poor and against injustices in the Liberian society**

In both the Old and New Testaments, the poor have always been at the centre of both Judaism and emulated during the formation of the early church. The issue of justice had been keen on the minds of those who lead because they believed that the God they served is the God of Love and of Justice who is ever willing to come in defence of his people.

As a respond to the needy, the church had tended to put emphasis either on the social compassion or social construction. The pendulum tends to swing between purely personal involvement or structural engagement, depending on such factors as whether the church is in a minority or majority situation, theologically tending to withdraw from pessimistic about the world or confidently engaged because the kingdom is now working in the world.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

<sup>124</sup> *Conference Journal* of the 175<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church held with Cape Palmas District LAC/UMC, Maryland County, Liberia February 11-17, 2009; p111

<sup>125</sup> Walls and Russ, 2008: p49

As it is mentioned in the Old Testament, there were conditions set for meeting up with the obligations for the poor and there were regulations regarding the poor in the social strata. Walls and Ross wrote:

Historically, the Jews were told to create a society where, because of the memory of the memory of their own slavery, the poor, the weak, and the strangers are to be treated with special care. There were gleaning and harvest laws meant to provide for landless people like Ruth and Naomi (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 19:9-10; Ruth 2). There were legal safeguard against taking advantage of those who are especially vulnerable, like the widow and orphan and the alien in their midst (Exodus 22:21-24). Their internal economy forbids lending to the needy with interest. The poor debtor must be treated with courtesy, and his collateral, like his cloak that he uses against the cold, must be returned by sunset (Exodus 22:25-27; Deuteronomy 24:10-24) these are but some of the host of legislation designed to remember the poor. In both the Old and New Testaments, there is a strong concern that Israel should put them (the poor) at the centre of their vision; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 15:7; 24:14-15; Psalm 41:1; Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 19:21; Galatians 2:10).<sup>126</sup>

Seeing that the poor still existed during the time of Jesus Christ and the Early Church, and looking at the brilliant effort of the Judaism to cater for the Early Church, it is expedient to build on Judaism's legacy of institutionalised charity.

They pooled their resources together, enrolled widows into some kind of feeding programme, and in general terms as a social safety net for those who were especially needing help among them (Acts 2:44-45; 5:1-11; 6:1-7).<sup>127</sup>

The fourth mark of the mission, social transformation, as developed by Walls and Ross affirm that social transformation must be seen in the context of mission and never projected as something of the future.

---

<sup>126</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p50

<sup>127</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008 :p49

The mission of the church must be holistic in nature. God provides for his human creation as well as for his whole creation. God is a God that is whole, affecting and embracing all of human life and all of human beings.

A shalom that reaches out to feelings, institutions, thoughts, and actions. He is a God who reaches out to those who are singing, crying, laughing and hopping food and hunger, water and thirst, fatigue and sleep. God reaches out to nakedness and clothes, sickness and health, hopelessness and seed of hope. He is a God that can be experienced by all his creation both human and non-human alike. The gift of God is not an individual gift, it is a community gift.

It relates to more than just one person, one community, one clan, one language, one place. Individual and collective, personal and community are not categories and life experience that God would keep separately. The mission of the church is integrated; they are integrated in God himself and it is impossible to look at one of them without focusing on the other.”<sup>128</sup> You cannot possibly address one without considering all of them. God is all embracing and loves all in the same way. There is no rich or poor, male or female, literate or illiterate, he loves and focuses on all. In order to stress the integration of the marks of mission, Walls and Ross recapped them in this way:

The first two marks go together and affirm that the message of the gospel must be lived out. It must be announced, embraced, nurtured and lived out in community:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

These two marks tell us that the Christian faith presents us with an interpretative content, whereby we can see who we are, where we come from, and what we are here for.”<sup>129</sup> The Christian faith formats our understanding of life, gives us a perception of reality and a way to look at the world and into the future. It is not a theory, but a life sharing story that connects us to our life origin and purpose and as well as to others, and the community of others. The

---

<sup>128</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p62-63

<sup>129</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p62-63

Christian faith must be lived out and shared otherwise; it cannot be understood and embraced. The Christian faith needs to be nurtured or else, it will not grow. “It needs to show its reality and significance by being lived out in the community that is a call to be no less than a sign of whom God is and what he wants.”<sup>130</sup>

John Day says that “the United Methodist Church in Liberia condemns corruption and injustice.”<sup>131</sup> John Day noted that “the church is sometimes part of the injustices that have been done to people.”<sup>132</sup>

You have pastors, you have people who profess to be Christians but they are just selfish, they just talk about themselves. But when it comes to really doing the work of the church, you have to stand up in the right way; be the voice of the voiceless, not just by words but it should be done by deeds, stand before the power that leads. So when we say speaking, some of the United Methodist Ministers speak against that but I am not confrontational. For example if the president does not seem to be doing what is right, I just write a letter and say, I would like to make an appointment with you Scripturally.”<sup>133</sup>

John Day emphasized that why it is the responsibility of the prophet to sound the warning to the nation. It is also the responsibility of the people to respect the authority of the nation. He said:

We have to respect those in authority rather than getting on the air to condemn; you only become more un-prophetic when the person does not listen. But I go to the President sometimes, we sit one on one and I point out some of the things people are saying and let him know that these are some of the things the people are saying about him. “You need to listen, you need to change,” and she will definitely do that. We talk about how corruption is undermining her leadership and that something needs to be done about it.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008,:p63

<sup>131</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>132</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>133</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>134</sup> John Simo, 2012

However, the United Methodist Church in Liberia and Grand Bassa County operates with various departments and committees. The pastors or the bishop are not the only authority responsible to speak on issues. Nike J. said:

It is the responsibility of the United Methodist human rights monitor to condemn and even engage people who are imprisoned; so we go there and provide legal aid, not just condemning.<sup>135</sup>

Nike J confirmed the Human Rights Monitor is the legal aid of the church by adding that:

We have been involved in providing legal services on a pro bono basis for indigence of the church and we have that project set up and it has been running for four years. Although the issue of sustainability has been the challenge, we are going to find a way out. We were not heavily involved in that project but we are still involved in providing legal services on a pro bono “involving or doing legal work for free”<sup>136</sup> basis for indigence on a very low skill. Last year 2011, we were able to provide legal services to five persons – three adults and two juveniles.”<sup>137</sup>

Speaking further on UMC’s Human Right Monitor provision of legal services to the poor Nike J explained that:

This year 2012, the UMC provided only for one juvenile from the Monrovia Central Prison. We have four other cases but because of the limited resources we have not been able to move in there. Even in Bassa, last year we were able to release six females from prison who were illegally arrested by the police based on some connection the perpetrator had with the police. Based on that, they arrested these people from Eye-Eye on the Bassa High Way and we moved in. We were able to release these people, so that’s some of the work we have been doing.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Nike J, 2012

<sup>136</sup> <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/search/pro%20bono>, accessed 09.04.2013

<sup>137</sup> Nike J, 2012

<sup>138</sup> Nike J, 2012



On the issue of corruption, Nike J. expounded that:

The UMC has been speaking so that the County Development Fund (CDF) including Social Development Fund (SDF) from companies like the Buchanan Renewable (BR) and the Arcelor Mittal can be accounted for. There were issues of county development fund and social development fund from these multinationals and you know the people of Grand Bassa have not benefited. We have been monitoring the situation there and they said they are willing to work with the county development to know how far they are.<sup>139</sup>

He concluded by saying that:

The church had been silent; the church needs to wake up. Civil society organizations need to begin to speak because for too long they have been quiet, we do not know if they have been bought or not but we need to speak with one voice so that the lives of our people and this nation can begin to rise.<sup>140</sup>

This interviewee is sounding very frustrated over the silence of the church and civil society groups. He feels like many in Liberia are their hope for the correction of the ills in the Liberian society.

Koko J, however tend to agree with Nike J's concluding statement adding that:

The United Methodist Church in Liberia is very silent when it comes to speaking out against the ills in the society. What affects the people and the church is not speaking out. If you do not listen to the talk shows on radio, you will not know what is going on. And mind you, we have the Liberia Council of churches, (LCC) and the Inter Faith Mediation Council (IFMC), where the Muslim and Christians meet, but you do not hear one minister preaching out

---

<sup>139</sup> Nike J, 2012

<sup>140</sup> Nike J, 2012

against the ills in the society. Things are still rough, things are hard and I told bishop about it in a meeting that the church needs to wake up. I told them what I was told and I read that the church becomes the voice of the voiceless but in this country; the church is very silent, very silent. Prices escalate and the people are suffering; just few are enjoying the wealth of the country while masses suffer. The church is not doing anything, they are silent<sup>141</sup>

The third mark of mission makes a beautiful transition between the *Kerygma* “(the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ)”<sup>142</sup> and *Diakonia* (the service, which one man renders to another -- Luke 10, 40, "or especially the service rendered to Christians, 1 Cor. 16, 15,) "<sup>143</sup> and the carving for justice.<sup>144</sup>

The United Methodist Church has freedom of speech, belief, fear and want. These are four freedoms in 30 articles dealing with one or more human rights. Freedom of speech comprise of three sub-categories: civil rights like freedom of expression, political rights like active and passive franchise, and judicial rights like the rights to due process. These are called the blue rights because they pertain to the rights and liberty of citizens. The second category comprises socio-economic rights such as housing, food, clothing, education and social security.

One of the most decisive and pressing issues to confront Christians in all parts of the globe in the past decades has been what Gustavo Gutierrez calls “the irruption of the poor”<sup>145</sup> that is the rapidly and irregularly augment in number of the poor.

The phrase ‘the irruption of the poor’ means that those who until now were “absent” from history are gradually becoming “present” within it. This new presence of the poor and oppressed is making itself felt in the popular struggle for liberation and in the historical consciousness arising from these struggles. It is also making itself felt within the church, for the poor are increasingly making their voices heard and claiming openly their right to live

---

<sup>141</sup> Koko J, 2012

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kerygma>, accessed April 29, 2013

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.wordnik.com/words/diakonia>, April 29, 2013

<sup>144</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p63

<sup>145</sup> Kirk, 2002: p96

and think the faith in their own way. The poor are often thought of as those who are deprived of the essential objects which sustain life – adequate nourishment, housing, clothing and healthcare.<sup>146</sup>

While these are the fundamental criteria for the poor, they varied from country to country and region to region. A poor in Europe could be considered as a rich in some parts of Africa. These criteria define poverty in terms of the quantity of goods and services available to people.

The criteria which define life in terms of quality, realities which may be both the cause and material deprivation, are also vital. Social Justice is the fair and proper administration of laws conforming to the natural law that all persons, irrespective of ethnic origin, gender, possessions, race, religion, etc., are to be treated equally and without prejudice.<sup>147</sup>

Addressing the Liberia Council of Churches in a seminar held on Thursday, March 21, 2013 on “The Role of the Church in the Fight for Justice and Rights in Liberia,” human rights and justice advocate Aloysius Toe, challenged bishops and church leaders to rise up and face the reality of the day. He observed that by choosing the topic, “The Role of the Church in the Fight for Justice and Rights.” Toe said that:

I am of the assumption that members of the Liberian Council of Churches are rediscovering their lost values since the days of Archbishop Michael Francis, Bishop Arthur F. Kulah and Bishop George D. Browne. I am tempted to believe that you are concerned about injustices and want to do something about them, like in the past.<sup>148</sup>

Quoting Paul Gifford, a British journalist and writer once pronounced a scathing condemnation on the Christian Church in Liberia; Gifford’s views provide a firm basis for

---

<sup>146</sup> Kirk, 2002: p97

<sup>147</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/social-justice.html>, accessed March 1, 2013

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysius-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

our reflection in assessing the Christian Church lamented Toe. Writing in his book, “*Christianity and Politics in Samuel Doe’s Liberia*,” Gifford wrote:

Liberian Christianity - far from being a force for justice and human advancement – diverted attention from the cause of Liberia’s ills, left change to God’s miraculous intervention, encouraged obedience and acceptance of the status quo, and thus served to entrenched injustices in society.<sup>149</sup>

Gifford maintains that:

The Christian Church in Liberia was (and I still think is) a “contributing factor in the oppression, illiteracy, underdevelopment, impoverishment and destruction of an entire country.”<sup>150</sup>

The Right activist added that “these assertions are true today with the Christian Church in Liberia.”<sup>151</sup> The human rights advocate pays tribute and recognizes the sacrifices of few Liberia’s religious leaders who obeyed the Master’s call of confronting injustices in Liberia. He named:

Bishop Arthur Kulah – that fearless and courageous minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis – the lonely voice in the wilderness; the only John the Baptist in Herod Charles Taylor’s Liberia; the late Bishop George D.

---

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

<sup>150</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

<sup>151</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

Browne of the Episcopal Church. Edward Wilmot Blyden – an ordained Presbyterian Minister, the Rev. Dr. Robert Tikpor, the Rev. Bartholomew Colley...<sup>152</sup>

Gilford's claim that the Liberian Christian community has reneged on its role to promote social justice and advance human rights, but at the same time pin-pointing and singling out few clergymen, who have stood out for the cause of justice, is far from contradiction.

The point is that Christian Church as a collective institution is weak and spineless. However, the Catholic Church under Bishop Francis, the Methodist Church under Bishop Kulah and the Episcopal Church under Bishop Brown have been a powerful force in the fight for justice and human rights.

Toe said that while it was seen as the church speaking in those cases, it was actually individuals in the church who were braving the storm to speak against the ills in the Liberian Society. He explained that:

These actions were inspired and led by the individuals who presided over these institutions rather than well-thought out institutional policies. The evidence of appalling silence and tragic indifference can be seen since all of them left the stage, he expounded. This lack of well defined policy has left the church dormant and without collective action to be responsive to the crippling vices of corruption, human rights abuses; thus, subjugated the masses to abject poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment. Politicians have long capitalized and exploited the Church's silence to legitimate power.

The Holy Bible speaks of whenever God designated a king of Israel, there was always a prophet to serve as a mirror – always reminding the political establishment of the way forward.

---

<sup>152</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

The prophets were always criticizing the king for going wrong, as in the case of Prophet Elijah, Nathan, John the Baptists and others. Therefore this is the historical mission of the Christian Church and is the responsibility of the Church.<sup>153</sup>

The church in general and the UMC in particular is not focusing their sermons on those things that are actions on redemption, freedom and justice. The church teaches that the remedy to our economic, social or political cause by the devil thus only prayers not social analysis or political activity can solve our problems.

Further elaborating on the problems in Liberia Toe continued that:

At the time when God's children are facing numerous problems - hunger, disease, darkness, illiteracy, abject poverty, theft of their resources by corrupt and heartless officials, unemployment is rampant, poor educational and health facilities are all over the place, teachers, health workers and civil servants cannot get pay – the Christian Church chose not to be bother at all with these problems.<sup>154</sup>

John Day acknowledge that Rom 13:1, “All authority is from God and must be obeyed.” The people are to unquestionably obey those in authority, not just United Methodists but all peace loving children of God.

Under the regimes of Doe and Taylor, the Church forgot about the freedom of the press, the freedom of speech, the freedom to associate, respect for human rights, and freedom of God's children from want, disease, poverty and illiteracy. The only freedom that seem to matter to the Church is the freedom to evangelize and raise collections and write proposals.

---

<sup>153</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-alloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

<sup>154</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-alloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

The church in general and the United Methodist Church in particular urges the poor widows in their churches to pay their widow's might for collection (Sunday's offering) but in turn bestow honours on corrupt officials as "fathers" and "mothers" of the year. They never honour the poor of the church, but recognize the highest bidder. One of the United Methodist Church officials told me that during the early days of the civil war in Liberia's Grand Bassa County, the United Methodist Church decided to honour one of Charles Taylor's wives, Agnes Howard Taylor, something that was frond on by the District Superintendent at the time. In the most recent years in Grand Bassa County, the church came to almost disrepute, when a convict murderer was honoured as father of the year in one the United Methodist Churches.

They tell the little children of their churches that "God will provide their needs according to his riches in glory," but fail to tell them that they are out of school, cannot go to hospital when they are sick, cannot wear something good on Sundays, cannot afford full meals daily because somebody sitting on Capitol Hill and the Executive Mansion cannot pay their mothers and fathers.<sup>155</sup>

Church leaders preach and urge their congregations to hope for life after death, but they deliberately ignore to tell them that Liberia can provide them with enjoyment and good living conditions here on earth by equitable distribution of the proceeds from the sale of iron, timber, gold, diamond, maritime customs, etc, etc. When things get tough, they urge members to be awake and read Psalm 125, but they fail to equally raise their voice to the political power to read the faces of suffering Liberians.

Day in day out, Church leaders echo Isaiah 61:1-2. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release to the prisoners.'

By healing the broken hearted, God wants the Church to raise its voice against those who

---

<sup>155</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloyisious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

produce and reproduce poverty and keep his people hungry and sick. By proclaiming freedom for the captives and liberty to prisoners, God wants the Church to publicly denounce and take action in the interest of those unjustly detained and languishing in unfavourable jail cells. God wants the Church to walk the streets in protest. Toe urged the church to:

March forward Church, never turn back. March against the walls of oppression, corruption and economic mismanagement. March against unemployment and hunger for God's children that you are shepherding. March for salary payments. "Your silence is hurting the nation, wake up and act. Jesus is knocking at the door of Justice, Toe told the church leaders."<sup>156</sup>

Quoting a Catholic Bishops Lent Letter published in 1978 entitled 'Social Justice' - "Justice is not alms-giving; it is not charity; it is rendering to each and every person his or her due."

Toe said:

The church must make elected officials accountable. It is not sufficient to disagree privately with decisions and actions that affect society – each of you must not fail to say and do things which you know clearly are your duties. The Choice is yours to decide what is best for Liberia.<sup>157</sup>

The United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County to a largest extent had not done too much to address the social disparity between the rich and the poor. Though there are always district officials that oppose to behaviours that tend to dent the reputation of the church, they are sometimes placed in a very tight spot to adequately respond since those who are called to be honoured by local churches are powerful figures and any rejection in public could put the said official at risk.

---

<sup>156</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013

<sup>157</sup> <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-aloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed April 13, 2013



#### **4.4 The Church's Response to Human Needs by loving Service**

The church's response to human need is very crucial yet very diverse. The needs and want of people are so many and it will take a fortune to respond to, yet there will still be need. However, in this session, I am going to present the feelings of the people of Grand Bassa County on how much they think that the church has responded to their needs. The interviewees listed the following areas that they feel that the UMC has made an impact in its response.

##### **4.4.1 Transformation through Education**

Education is no doubt the greatest gift that any man can give to his children and that any organization can offer to its member or any Government can give to its citizens. "Governments in both developed and developing world are being increasingly judged by their ability to address the problems of inequality and unfairness,"<sup>158</sup> especially in the educational sector of nations. Walls and Ross point out that:

The last twenty years has seen an effort to engender what has been termed as the 'massification' of higher education to subvert the traditional elitism of the university system.<sup>159</sup>

Using Great Britain as an example, Walls and Ross wrote:

More students from deprived neighbourhoods and post codes could find a place in higher education breaking the bridge of elitism in higher education. For Christian educational foundations, this interest in the excluded and socially disinherited is part of their mission and calling. They do better on the average in attracting and caring for students who are the first entrants to higher education in their families than other universities in the country. The Liverpool Hope University for example was the result of the coming together of three collages

---

<sup>158</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p 170

<sup>159</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p171

two of which was founded in the mid-nineteenth century. Several Collages were established to address the need of the poor in the area of education.<sup>160</sup>

The history of education and the intervention by the church in the provision of social services such as education to the poor and disinheritance is not a strange phenomenon in Liberia.

Social services provision such as education and health to the underprivileged by the United Methodist Church in Liberia has a long and passionate history. The History of educational contribution dates back as early as the 1900s, when Methodist Missionaries established mission schools for the education of young Liberians. Today, there are a total one hundred and three United Methodist Schools spread across the length and breadth of Liberia, owned and operated by the Department of General Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church. During the period 1990 to 2012, there were more schools built in Grand Bassa County than the past 150 years of the church's existence. According to Joshua Smith:

The United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County is one of the leading Christian denominations trying to alleviate the suffering of the people of Bassa by providing sound education.<sup>161</sup>

Joshua Smith further stated that:

The Bassa people believed that when a person is educated, he or she should be ready to face life challenges and is referred to as a civilized man or woman. Apart from obligation to yourself and your immediate family, you as an educated person in a small community where there are no many educated people, have a communal responsibility of reading mail and letters coming to the community for anyone who cannot read and write and reply to the said mail.<sup>162</sup>

Joshua Smith, a non-Methodist sent out lot of praises for the United Methodist Church Educational System and terming one of its high schools as:

---

<sup>160</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p171

<sup>161</sup> Joshua, Smith a non-Methodist from Grand Bassa County, interviewed Buchanan, Liberia, 26-07-12.

<sup>162</sup> Joshua, Smith, 2012

One of the outstanding schools in academic performance in Grand Bassa County is the W.P.L. Brumskine United Methodist High School in Buchanan; this school operates classes from nursery to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>163</sup>

Underscoring the academic and extra curriculum courses added to the school's calendar, Joshua Smith went on to say that:

Besides the academic program offered by the W.P.L. Brumskine United Methodist High School in Buchannan, it is about the only school in Grand Bassa County that has other vocational programs added to its curriculum in order to make the students productive and self employed after their completion of high school. Courses such as Tie and Dye, Soap Making and Tailoring are part of the regular school curriculum.<sup>164</sup>

The establishment of these vocational programs and school support at the W.P.L. Brumskine United Methodist High School came as a result of a partnership agreement between W.P.L. Brumskine United Methodist High School, and a non-governmental and United Methodist related organization known as Operation Classroom (OC). The group provided educational material for both staff and students such as notebooks, pens, pencils, dusting chinks, calculators, books, health kits, toothpastes, bathing soap, dusting powders, clothes for both staff and students, enough to share with others in need, who were not part of the Brumskine UMS. OC as it is popularly known, also provided salary and funding for the vocational programs, assistance for salaries of staff and transportation allowances, funding for maintaining the buildings on campus and for the construction of new classrooms and library, etc.

---

<sup>163</sup> Joshua, Smith, 2012

<sup>164</sup> Joshua Smith, 2012



Figure 2: The W.P.L. Brumskine United Methodist High School, Old Field Buchanan City, Grand Bassa District, LAC/UMC, taken August 10, 2012

In the 2000s, the vocational programs at the school attracted most of the students as the programs were a regular part of the curriculum instead of being paid for by parents. I was also registered at the school, besides the W.P.L. Brumskine United Methodist High School that I attended.

There are other educational institutions owned by the United Methodist Church that are providing quality education to the people of Grand Bassa County. According to John:

The Camphor Memorial United Methodist Mission station was established in 1947 as a result of a United Methodist Pastor who dreamt of becoming an elder in the United Methodist Church but was denied ordination by the Liberia Annual Conference on grounds that he could not read nor write in English.<sup>165</sup>

Theological degrees were not as common as it is nowadays because there were not many opportunities given to people as the grassroots to go through academic school which will prepare one for college to earn a degree. My father told me a story that the major entrance to

---

<sup>165</sup> John simo,2012

Hartzel High School, now Bassa High School in Grand Bassa County was simply your “surname.” In most cases he said if your surname did not represent a name from the Americo–Liberian group, you were denied access to high school and as such, you will never get the degree that you dreamt of. Apparently, it was the case of the founder of the Camphor United Methodist Mission in Tubmanville, Grand Bassa County, when according to most of the interviewees who knew the history of the founding of the mission, lamented. According to some interviewees, the founding of the Camphor United Methodist Mission station has a peculiar history of its establishment. Nelly Julia explained that:

The Camphor Memorial United Methodist Mission School was started by people who could not read nor write in English and for this reason was denied Elder ordination in the United Methodist Church. They were actually three men who were denied and they decided to take action by breaking away from the UMC. But one of the three, after giving it a second thought decided to advocate for the establishment of a school in the area that will eventually bring light to the community and stopped others from going through the same pain of not being able to achieve what they really want to achieve because of illiteracy.<sup>166</sup>

For his part, Koko J Further explained that:

The Camphor Mission in Tubmanville, Grand Bassa County came to being because some of our traditional pastors who were not academically educated were denied ordination, so they decided to break away from the church but one of them decided to stay and transformed the situation, by seeing to it that an institution was built to educate boys and girls and prevent them from being denied any opportunity in life just because of not having a formal education.<sup>167</sup>

And yet still John Simo elaborated that:

---

<sup>166</sup> Nelly Julia, 2012

<sup>167</sup> Koko J. 2012

The dream of this denied pastor and committed United Methodist has transformed the lives of thousands of people not just from Grand Bassa County, but from across Liberia. He took advantage of his denial for ordination because he could not write English, and established a school. I am a product of that school and look at me today. What if that school was not there, maybe I would be cutting palm-nuts to survive. But thank God that He used the church through this man to bring life to the people in this area.<sup>168</sup>

While this image of the church might look so positive when it comes to helping to transform the situation of people in Grand Bassa County through educational programs, Joshua Smith has called on the church to do more as he elaborated:

The church has done well in terms of providing education for our people, that is providing primary, Junior and Senior high education. However, we have thought that given the length of time that the UMC has stayed in Grand Bassa County, they would by now be contemplating on operating at least a university level institution here in Grand Bassa County because the time is ripe. There are a number of students coming out of high school annually and the county school we have here which is the Grand Bassa Community College does not have the capacity to absorb all of the students. If the United Methodist Church would think in the direction of establishing a college education institution, I am sure that will help to do well for the society.<sup>169</sup>

While Joshua Smith is calling for a college institution to be operated in Grand Bassa County, J. Koko said, “The church has done a lot in the area of education and is still building schools especially in the interior parts of the county.”<sup>170</sup> Jonathan Day expresses it in a more practical fashion as he elaborated in these words:

Where the government is not reaching, the church is and all is geared towards the people feeling the love of Jesus Christ, transforming them from being

---

<sup>168</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>169</sup> Joshua Smith 2012

<sup>170</sup> Koko J, July 29, 2012

illiterate to literate and useful citizen. When we tell the people that Jesus loves you, we show them that love by actions in the form of education, we build schools and provide teachers for those schools so that every Liberian can have equal opportunity, no matter which part of the country one might be.<sup>171</sup>

According to the interviewees, not having equal opportunity led to the establishment of the Camphor United Methodist mission station, after a pastor was denied ordination into the elder order of the United Methodist Church because he could not read and write Nelly Julia, a United Methodist for example acknowledges that:

The church has built schools, we have built a lot of schools in the Grand Bassa area especially in most remote areas of Bassa like the Bishop's wife home. Building a school and a clinic there brought life to that part of the area.<sup>172</sup>

Besides the main educational program, Camphor has over the years developed into a full mission station. It has two dormitories for students, teachers' and nurses' quarters and a clinic that provides health care and counselling to many in the towns and villages around Tubmanville Township.

According to Mamie, a non-Methodist whose children's lives are being transformed by the United Methodist Church said, "The placing of the school in the area has really benefited many Liberians including my three children who are also non-Methodists from the school's scholarship program."<sup>173</sup> Emphasizing further on the aspect of the scholarship program awarded to the children of the Township of Tubmanville in Grand Bassa County the non-Methodists parent said that:

The United Methodist Church is really helping people to educate their children through the scholarship. I am not a Methodist but the church is helping to educate my children. Can you imagine, I have three children and all of them benefit from the mission's scholarship program. Without the church, my

---

<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Day, 2012

<sup>172</sup> Nelly Julia, July 29, 2012

<sup>173</sup> Mamie, A none-Methodist from Grand Bassa County, interviewed August 2, 2012

children would not have gone to school because the schools fees are very high and I cannot afford it. I really want to thank the church.<sup>174</sup>

I believe that the dream of the denied pastor was that every Liberian should have the same level of education for the same opportunity in life no matter where they live and despite their tribal, religious or political backgrounds. The story of Mamie goes for many across Grand Bassa County for the United Methodist Church transforming their lives through their education or the education of their children or that of a neighbour.

All of the respondents and interviewees agreed that the church had made significant landmarks in building schools in the areas that had no schools and clinic, which others had not thought of even the government which is making a serious drive in transforming the lives of the people by taking them out of illiteracy.

Carol, with a lot of smiles on her face said:

Boy, we are making the kind of progress and I think that it could not had come without the mentioning of the Norwegian Methodist Church Assistance program for development. Through that program, we have built a clinic and a school in Palapolu, an area of six hours walk from the nearby school and motor road and almost nine hours walk to the nearby clinic. You can imagine how the people feel about the UMC in that area. It had been a total joy during the time of the construction projects, to see community dwellers carrying 50kgs bags of cement and other building materials on their heads for six hours; it was commendable<sup>175</sup>

While it is true that people agreed that the church has done a lot to transform the lives of the people of Grand Bassa County and Liberia through their academic programs, students from the United Methodist Church Brighter Future Children Rescue Centre (BFC), expressed their happiness about the academic education drive. They also commended and are encouraging

---

<sup>174</sup> Mamie, 2012

<sup>175</sup> Carol, 2012



the UMC to engage in not just academic but also expand its vocational education. Some of the students I chatted with said:

We at BFC are happy with the academic education but more so, we are happy with our vocational education because it can make us self employed. We do not need to wait for someone to find jobs for us when we have vocational training, the job is already there.<sup>176</sup>

Another student further said that:

I am happy for the UMC because it has changed my life with my vocational skills, I can support myself and my family that is not able to work and earn money to support us. Secondly, not everyone will work in the office with neck tie on. I want to encourage the government to do more to help the UMC in the area of vocational education in Grand Bassa County.<sup>177</sup>

Still another student further noted that:

I am very happy for the United Methodist Church for the way it has really improved my life in six months. I knew nothing but this independence season I have made enough money to do what I want to do because of my vocational skills. It is because of the little skill I am acquiring from the United Methodist Church Brighter Future Children Rescue Centre, that I am able to see my importance.<sup>178</sup>

Besides the regular academic institutions being run in the county by the United Methodist Church, there is a teaching program for adult literacy. From what I observed as a child, there was adult literacy program run by the Liberian Government for people who could not read and write in many areas in Grand Bassa County during the early and late years of the 1980s. Apparently, the program might have gone on even longer before I got to know about it. The

---

<sup>176</sup> Computer Department student, Bright Future Children Rescue Centre (BFC), August 14, 2012

<sup>177</sup> Carpentry Department student, Bright Future Children Rescue Centre (BFC), August 14, 2012

<sup>178</sup> Cosmetology Department student, Bright Future Children Rescue Centre (BFC), Grand Bassa County, August 14, 2012

basic aim as I observed, was to teach older people how to read and write, and my first grade teacher was the head of it in Edina City. Since the 1990s, that aspect of education died a natural death, at least for the Edina area in Grand Bassa County. In 1998, I was among few High school graduates who took up the training to teach in the adult literacy school of the United Methodist church but due to logistical reasons, the program did not really pickup.

However, through the efforts of Bishop John G. Innis, resident bishop of the United Methodist Church, in partnership with ALFALIT International, adult literacy has resurrected and is alive not just in Grand Bassa County, but in most parts of Liberia.

The Program was implemented by the United Methodist Church in collaboration with other international partners. ALFALIT International is training both men and women in the area of adult literacy. Seven out of the eight geographical districts of Grand Bassa County are currently benefitting from the program.

One of the interviewees, who is one of the students at ALFALIT in District #4, highlighted the importance of the program and said that he and the entire community were happy with the efforts of the United Methodist Church in educating them. He added that: “It is our first time learning how to spell our own names and we will no longer use finger print to sign our names but will proudly handle the pen and write like anyone else.”<sup>179</sup>

Jueh Ceegar told me that he was not a United Methodist, rather a member of the Evangelical Congregation Church (ECC) but is happy with the work of the United Methodist Church in the county.

Apart from the educational programs being carried out in Grand Bassa County and around Liberia, the United Methodist Church has provided Scholarships to students from the county who had gone out and returned, and is making meaningful contributions to the county and the nation. Carol said that:

The UMC is always sponsoring students in various disciplines in various Universities and colleges in and out of Liberia which include: the United Methodist University in Monrovia, Cuttington University in Bong County,

---

<sup>179</sup> Jueh Ceegar, 2012

Liberia, Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe, and many others in and out of the country.<sup>180</sup>

With the tone of profound gratitude and smile lighting up her face, Carol said that:

The Church has produced doctors, theologians, educators, IT engineers, nurses, agriculturalist, teachers and I mean many disciplines through the educational and scholarship programs. The effort of the church is really helping to transform the lives of the people of Bassa and Liberia at large.<sup>181</sup>

It can be documented that between years 2000 and 2012, more than twenty students had been to study at higher institutions in and out of the country. J. Koko, says is commendable.

Abago, and all of the Methodists, Non-Methodists, politicians and traditionalist commend the UMC on her awarding of scholarships to deserving and underprivileged Bassa men and women, boys and girls to further their education in Liberia and around the world. Reminding me of the mission of the United Methodist church, John Simo elaborated:

Remember the mission of the church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ and transformation of the world is the subject that needs to be taught. The great transformer is Jesus Christ. The great teacher was Jesus Christ so he transformed lives through the process of education. So one of those ways that can curtail some of these practices is intentional education based on love. Sacrificial education, you need to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ, into the villages, into to the towns, into the forest. Often times many of us in Liberia do not want to do that when we get our education, we prefer being in Monrovia, maybe in Buchanan or where ever we are educated. We stay there and begin to condemn what is going on in society and do not want to participate in it, we do not offer anything productive that will redeem lives. We need to give back what others have contributed into making us who we are.<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Carol, 2012

<sup>181</sup> Carol, 2012

<sup>182</sup> John Simo, 2012

According to the director of Operation Classroom Liberia:

There are eleven of the total numbers of educational institutions owned and operated by the United Methodist Church located in Grand Bassa County, spread across Grand Bassa County.<sup>183</sup>

According to the interviewees, the United Methodist Church has done a tremendous job in providing education nursery to high school education in Grand Bassa County. The interviewees further asserted that the UMC also awarded scholarships to people who are unable to access university education due to poverty. Similar according to Walls and Ross the church in England played a similar role that saw an increase in the education of disinherited children from poor neighbourhoods and post codes getting the kind of education they needed to bridge the gap of elitism in education in England. All of the interviewees asserted that the church has and is transforming the lives of the people in Grand Bassa County through its education programs.

#### **4.4.2 Transformation through Health care**

The United Nations Millennium Development Goal, calls for the eradication of preventable disease for all people by the year 2015. If this must be the case in Liberia's Grand Bassa County, there is need for every well meaning organization or institutions to rise up to the task.

---

<sup>183</sup> Operation Classroom Coordinator, Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church, August, 2012



Figure 3: George Z. Dean Memorial United Methodist Clinic at the Camphor United Methodist Mission. This is first clinic built by the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, Liberia.

The United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County is seen by some of the interviewees to be taking steps in that direction of providing health services for the people. Carol, for example, said that:

The Norwegian government is doing a clinic for the people of Grand Bassa County in Palapolu, Grand Bassa District Conference while according to Koko J, there is another that has been built at John Dean Town in District Number Four, complementing the earlier Camphor Memorial United Methodist Clinic in District number Two, St. John River District Conference, Grand Bassa County. Gabriel explained that the church is also carrying out a project alongside the Liberian Government to build the largest referral hospital in District number two in Grand Bassa district, Grand Bassa county. The church has had a lot of workshops and we are still having workshops to educate our people on health matters. During the district conference of 2011, the church had cancer T-shirt as well as HIV and AIDS posters all around and seminars were held on the AIDS awareness. We are trying our possible best to do what we can, we are educating

our people, and we have all the equipment. I think the best thing is to continue with the workshops that we are having.”<sup>184</sup>

Most of the interviewees said that the church is aiding the government in spreading the message about HIV and AIDS. Koko J. emphasised that there is an improvement in the area of health especially in Grand Bassa County; most of the areas have clinics.

Highlighting his knowledge of the church’s health department board, he added that he knew what the church was doing. “We have clinics all over even in John Dean Town, there is a clinic there, in Camphor there is a clinic; you know Ganta Hospital, you know Weahlah.”<sup>185</sup>

He added that besides the building of clinics and holding workshops:

The United Methodist Church took upon paying the hospital bills of people that were not able to pay during the period of the civil war at various hospitals in the country, like Catholic Hospital, S.D.A Cooper Hospital, Phebee Hospital and other hospitals around the country.<sup>186</sup>

It may be recorded that most of Liberia’s social services such as schools, water, electricity and health facilities were destroyed, leaving just a few running on a skeletal scheme and were very expensive for ordinary Liberian to afford their services during the height of the war.

Another aspect of health care that has claimed the attention of the United Methodist Church is the prevention of HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS is not peculiar to Grand Bassa County, Liberia or Africa alone but it is a worldwide pandemic. However, Jonathan said “the the issue of HIV and AIDS is a serious issue for the church, the national government and for all”.<sup>187</sup> Koko J praised the effort of the United Methodist Department of Health Services adding that:

---

<sup>184</sup> Carol, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, August 6, 2012.

<sup>185</sup> Koko J, Grand Bassa County, July 29, 2012

<sup>186</sup> Koko J, 2012

<sup>187</sup> Jonathan Day, a United Methodist, Grand Bassa County, Liberia August 14, 2012

The church, through her Department of Health has been able to work with her clinics, like the clinic at Camphor Mission and other health institutions and schools in the county, to ensure that the issue of HIV/AIDS is something to talk about even in the church, your family devotion, prayer service and your daily life because it is something that has the propensity to kill the very church if nothing is done.<sup>188</sup>

The provision of health services and the spreading of information key to the prevention of diseases such as HIV and AIDS is the sole responsibility of the government. However Jonathan Day said that:

HIV and AIDS is the concern of the church because it affects the would-be pastors, choristers and youth leaders. If they are affected by HIV/AIDS, the future of the church will be crippled. The church is doing what she can through establishing health clubs in some of the Methodist schools where students can now begin to talk about HIV/AIDS, and is also involved in debate forum, radio dramas, some bill-board and other things to ensure that the message is spread to our people though in a minimal way; the church is buttressing government efforts in doing that.<sup>189</sup>

On the issue of what the church is doing to make people aware of one of the world's largest killer disease, Koko J shares the similar view as most of the interviewees that:

The UMC is helping the government in spreading the message on the prevention of HIV and AIDS in most of the United Methodist Schools. There is a program where students talk about HIV/AIDS; it is no more a secret. Church members talk about it in the church and in all the health facilities even in the communities; so the church is playing a major role.<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Koko J, 2012

<sup>189</sup> Jonathan Day, 2012

<sup>190</sup> Koko, J Interviewed July 29, 2012

Adding her voice to the level of work that the church is doing on the spreading of the message on prevention of HIV and AIDS, Carol said that:

The UMC have had a lot of workshops and we are still having workshops. Even last year during our district conference, we had the sign of the HIV/AIDS all up. We are trying our possible best to do what we can. We are educating our people; I think the best thing is to continue the workshops that we are having.<sup>191</sup>

I cannot agree more that the UMC has made stride in the provision of health care to the people of Grand Bassa County in a bid to transform their lives. Efforts to construct clinics in areas deep into the interior, inaccessible to motor road, is something worth mentioning.

As human needs are numerous, there is a need for us to approach it from various fronts, especially needs that sustain life. According to the interviewees, the UMC's mission, in GBCO has made great strides in meeting the needs of the people. This leads me to the next topic in the response to human needs; transformation through the provision of clean and safe drinking water.

#### **4.4.3 Transformation through Water and Sanitation**

In 1987 after graduating from high school, one of my first job was to work with a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) called Water and Sanitation incorporation. It was a job that earned me just \$30.00 United States Dollars per month as a salary. But I was so fascinated about the job, not because of the money I earned, but the opportunity that I had to see where most people in the rural parts of Grand Bassa County fetched their water for drinking, cooking, washing and everything that water can be used for. Before going out, I was given some kind of purification pill that I had to put in every glass of water that I drank while in the field to prevent me from contracting water born diseases. Though I did appreciate my job at that time, I appreciated it even more when I was in the field collecting data for this thesis.

---

<sup>191</sup> Carol,2012



Like the disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35-39) Jesus call come and see. It was an invitation ‘to join him in the places where he chose to live, to sit with him, to hear what he heard, to feel what he felt to laugh and to weep with him, to celebrate the things that he celebrated.’<sup>192</sup>

Most often, people do not know where this call will take them but what is important is to answer the call in the affirmative.

People of faith, according to Walls and Ross; “have shown themselves to be fairly good in the concrete delivery of social services.”<sup>193</sup> Faith based organizations like the UMC are more and more winning the trust of donor’s community by the high standard of professional and ethical commitment they showed in social services delivery.<sup>194</sup>

However, there is need to address the larger context of poverty. Walls and Ross suggests that:

Besides the relief and development work we (the church) need to engage in politics, recompose power elites, reconstruct social arrangements and engage in advocacy on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves (Proverb 31:8-9).<sup>195</sup>

There is the idea that evangelism is in itself a response to the need for social transformation. Changing individuals will automatically mean change in societies. This is not always true, especially in societies where people are taught to live according to the order of the day and to hope for better days beyond the grave. In other words, people are to be loyal to authorities no matter how abusive the authority might be. Paul warns in (Ephesians 6:12) that:

---

<sup>192</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p53

<sup>193</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008:p53

<sup>194</sup> Walls and Ross 2008: p51

<sup>195</sup> Walls and Ross

We are not just battling against flesh and blood, but against ‘the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.’<sup>196</sup>

Mamie, a non-Methodist in a very joyous mood expressed her gratitude to the UMC for the construction of hand pumps in their area, thus providing the towns and villages in District #3 with safe drinking water. She said that:

All of the villages around here now have hand pumps built by the United Methodist Church. We are happy with their work because where we used to get water to drink was very bad. The water was crossing the road and people used to walk in the water, animals will walk and drink the same water, at the same time we washed with same water. One day a guest came to visit the mission and was taken to see where the communities here got water to drink. The man felt bad and after few times, the United Methodist Church built more than four pumps in most of the villages around here.<sup>197</sup>

In Grand Bassa County according to Nike J:

The United Methodist Church has also been involved in little development work in the Bassa area. As I speak, the UMC through its Human Rights Monitor for water life projects, have built more than seventy five hand pumps in Liberia with about nine or ten of those pumps being in Grand Bassa County. We are also going there to do training so that people can be provided with basic technical knowhow on how to sustain the pump just in case of a breakdown, they will know how to fix it in our absence.<sup>198</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p 51

<sup>197</sup> Mamie, 2012

<sup>198</sup> Nike J., 2012



Hand Pump In District #4 Grabd Bassa County Constructed by the United Methodist Church picture taken August 7, 2012

Quoting Matthew 25:35b, Nike J further added that: Water is life and thirst is painful. Jesus said “I was thirsty and you gave me water to drink”<sup>199</sup>

Mamie added that: “The UMC constructed more than four hand pumps in the villages and towns surrounding the Camphor United Methodist Mission in Tubmanville, District Grand Bassa County<sup>200</sup> Pointing to a stream that was running across the main motor road in the area Mamie lamented, “come and see where we used to get water before the church came to our aid.”<sup>201</sup>

Koko J also commented on the provision of numbers of hand pumps that were constructed by the UMC in Grand Bassa County. He said that:

Oh! Yes, the UMC is transforming not just transforming lives by the provision of the hand pumps but the church is preventing people from dying by diseases you get from drinking unsafe water.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>199</sup> Nike J., 2012

<sup>200</sup> Mamie, 2012

<sup>201</sup> Mamie 2012

<sup>202</sup> Koko J, 2012

Nelly said that:

The UMC has constructed hand pumps to all of the churches that they built in the various districts in Grand Bassa County; the pumps are not just for UMC member but for the entire community.<sup>203</sup>

In most parts of the interior of Liberia, Grand Bassa County being of no exception, the issue of pure and safe drinking water for the rural population continue to stand out. Jonathan Day also acknowledged that “the church has constructed and is still constructing hand pumps all over Grand Bassa to provide safe and clean drinking water for our people.”<sup>204</sup> The church is not just constructing hand pumps on her property that provide for the entire community, but according to Spilo:

The United Methodist Church (UMC) has provided hand pumps, for safe drinking water for the community. You can see one of the best wells in Edina is a hand pump that was constructed by the UMC at the J.J. Cheeseman Elementary School in Central Edina. The whole of Central Edina never had a hand pump before – that particular pump caters for the entire central Edina though the major purpose of constructing it was to cater for the school. All of the towns and villages in that region, aswell as the one in Edina, cater for the population here and so the UMC has to cater for the community in the area of water very seriously. Since Edina was established in 1833, there has never been a hand pump in that region of Central Edina and it is a blessing that the UMC has done such a thing and I think the community is very grateful to the UMC for that.<sup>205</sup>

In the past, the major source of water in areas where these hand pumps were constructed was from streams, creeks, ponds or open wells. Sometimes these streams crossed the roads; people and animals walked on the water that people drank and used. At other times, especially during the dry season which runs from mid October to mid April, these creeks and

---

<sup>203</sup> Nelly Julia, 2012

<sup>204</sup> Jonathan Day, 2012

<sup>205</sup> Spilo, 2012

streams dried up leaving the communities struggling for life's basic commodity. It was very disgusting to visit the rural areas and drink water seeing the brownish colour of mud. Little was done by the government during that time to address the situation, up to date. However, all of the interviewees express their satisfaction and gratefulness to the UMC for transforming their lives through the provision of safe and clean drinking water. This is what Walls and Ross will call responding to human needs by loving service.

#### **4.4.4 Transformation through Construction of Roads and Bridges**

As human needs are so numerous and very widespread, so is the UMC response, making it a challenge for their mission in Grand Bassa County. In a continuous bid to respond to numerous human needs in Grand Bassa County, according to the interviewees, the United Methodist Church is constructing two bridges in the county which, when completed will help in transforming the lives of the people. Road network is one of the key social services that is lacking in striving to meet the human needs in Grand Bassa County, like most part of Liberia. The acute shortage of roads to most parts of the interior is a serious challenge to both the church in carrying out her mission work and to the local communities who ferry their farm produce to towns for better economic empowerment. Cognisant of this fact, the UMC in Grand Bassa County has embarked on the construction of two bridges in the county that links the major food market of Grand Bassa County, District #3C to the other parts of the county.

Walls and Ross warns that:

It is important to grasp that mere social development can run into a bottomless pit as a result of incessant political conflicts, tribal wars, bad governance and other such systemic ills results in unsettled demographic and perpetual instability. Painstaking development gains in grassroots communities can get easily wiped out by political disasters.<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p51

Walls and Ross also highlighted that: “People of faith have seen themselves to be fairly good in the concrete delivery of social services.”<sup>207</sup> This is why the UMC in Grand Bassa County sees her mission to be holistic in its service delivery. Jonathan Day said that:

It is interesting to note that the mission of the church is holistic. That holistic nature of the church has been manifested through the church’s program because, like the scripture says, everywhere Jesus went he was doing good; healing the blind, feeding the hungry and freeing those who were oppressed. Through the work of UMC and its partnership, two bridges that were damaged for the past twenty years are being reconstructed. The estimated cost of the project is over eighty thousand United States Dollars. The bridges will enable people from villages to travel to towns to supply their farm produce, thereby improving their economic empowerment and growth.<sup>208</sup>

This seems to be true as the United Methodist Church in its mission work, is transforming the lives of people in two political districts of Grand Bassa County (GBCO), through bridge construction and connecting the road network that has been neglected by government for over fifteen years.

Jonathan Day expressed that: “The UMC is carrying out a lot of projects in Grand Bassa County with funding from the Norwegian United Methodist Church.”<sup>209</sup> Carol also commented on the construction of the bridges in Grand Bassa County adding that “the bridges have brought a relief to the people in the area in particular and to Grand Bassa County and Liberia in general.”<sup>210</sup> Nelly added her voice by saying that:

The bridges in the county will bring economic empowerment to those who could not get their produce to the market and had to sell them cheap to people who exploited the situation to rob the people of their hard labour.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p 58

<sup>208</sup> Jonathan Day, 2012

<sup>209</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>210</sup> Carol, 2012

<sup>211</sup> Nelly Julia, 2012

The Gaye Town Community is situated in Giah Clan, Owensgroove District, in Lower Grand Bassa County. About four thousand people living in the Gaye Town Community struggled for many months to meet their daily needs. The community that is made up of 25 towns and villages lost the only bridge that connected the communities to the other parts of the county, which resulted in hardship for the people. As these towns and villages linked by this bridge depended on agriculture, community dwellers found it very difficult to take their produce to the market, as motorists found it very difficult to drive cross the 7.9 meters wide bridge.

I totally agree with Walls and Ross when they said that: It is important to grasp that mere social development can run into a bottomless pit as a result of incessant political conflicts, tribal wars, bad governance.

The road was constructed in 2009 through self-help community initiatives which included the construction of a log bridge to facilitate easy access. However, bridge collapsed due to many years of road use and the lack of Maintenance. As a result most businesses, agriculture and commercial activities were halted. This had a serious impact on businesses and commercial activities for the people of these communities. According to the DCS report:

There were enormous consequences for the people healthy wise, in business, agriculture, and education. Over 25 towns and villages in this area that depended on this single road for survival either by transporting their produce for sale at the local market or by accessing basic commodities for their everyday living, endured a lot of hardships. Many of the community folks relied on rubber cultivation for survival which meant that they had to trek two hours on foot with tons of rubber on their head to reach the nearest pick up point. Alternatively, they would devalue the rubber to those who were ready to carry out the labouring task of taking it to the nearest pickup point.

Grand Bassa County has a ministry of Public Works and Rural Development but apparently, none of them came to aid the struggling of people. The DCS wrote:

Over 3,500 persons living in this community whose livelihood heavily relied on the continuous access to the single road leading into the community had their fate hanging in a balance.<sup>212</sup>

The UMC saw the need of the struggling people and sought to address their plight. The DCS wrote:

The Department of Community Services (DCS), Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church was available to provide relief to the communities. The bridge was a double culvert bridge system, 63 feet long, 16 feet high and 24 feet wide including win walls. The project costed about 92,075.00 United States Dollars (USD). Again community members provided sand, rocks and labour as part of the collaboration and partnership.<sup>213</sup>

Indeed, this project raised the hopes of many who had not anticipated such developments. According to the DCS:

Upon full completion of the bridge, one elderly man could not fight back the tears of joy. He relished the new day of no more horrendous trekking with rubber on their head and a guarantee that they will now get a fair share of the market value for their rubber produce. The completion of the bridge made a huge difference in the lives of the people. Today, people are no longer ferrying rubber and other produce on their heads for several hours. People with health issues can also get to health centres without the challenges of the past. The economic situation of members of the community has drastically improved. Gaye Town Bridge has now become a life saver for those communities it is serving.<sup>214</sup>

Klens Town is on the Bassa Gio Road that is a major linkage for the people in Number Three C of District Number Three, Grand Bassa County. This is the agricultural heartbeat of the

---

<sup>212</sup> The Department of Community Services (DCS), Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, accessed from the department, March 12, 2013

<sup>213</sup> DCS report, LAC/UMC, accessed March 12, 2012

<sup>214</sup> DCS report, LAC/UMC, accessed March 12, 2013



area. The people in the towns in this region are involved in rubber, cane juice, pepper, and other cash crops that feed many markets in Bong, Bassa and Nimba. But there is one major obstacle, two bridges over the Wee and Gbee Rivers that make the connection and access difficult. As a result, the people are struggling with serious economic, health, and educational challenges. The people cannot afford to get a single bundle of zinc for their homes even though they have the money to buy it. Schools of better quality are difficult to construct because building materials will not reach the people easily. Equally, their valuable products cannot meet the competition for price and have been seriously undervalued.

In this time of great despair for the people, DCS is currently involved with the process of constructing one of the largest bridges in her project profile since her inception. The bridge crossing the Wee River has started in earnest and is expected to be completed in the next dry season. When successfully completed, it is expected that the project for the next river will commence. The completion of these bridges will revolutionize the economy of the entire region. In fact, it will be a trigger for effective farmers, students, citizens, and everyone that has been currently challenged by the lack of access on the current roads.

The entire populace of the region have lined up behind The United Methodist Church with one great united force to finish this project.



Klens Town Bridge (under construction)<sup>215</sup>

---

<sup>215</sup> DCS report, LAC/UMC, accessed March 12, 2012

#### 4.5 To seek to transform unjust structures of society

Unjust structures of society are those structures that are put in place by a society in favor of those in authority. Sometimes when new leaders come to power, they are trapped by these structures and find it very difficult to change what has been established. Putting one profession above the other or putting a male above the female. To transform them is to put them back into proper perspective and return the rights where they belong.

Transforming the unjust structure of society must mean addressing not only the global injustices which prevent the poor from accessing development, but also questioning our very aspiration of development towards lifestyles we now find to be unsustainable.

Statistics vary from country to country, but if everybody wanted to live at the level of the average Norwegian citizen, we would need more than three planet earth to support the world's current population. Justice must look not only at increasing access for the majority, but at drastically reducing the living standard of the wealthy western minority.

To transform the unjust structure of the society, we need to ask ourselves what are those things that the society holds, that might be seen well in the eyes of one group but has a damaging effect on the other. There are endless things that might craft the human society to be structured unjustly. However, for this thesis, two of these topics of the unjust structures of society will be discussed as seen in the eyes of the people of Grand Bassa County in relation to the United Methodist Church mission. As Walls and Ross rightly puts it, the fourth mark integration needs to be reaffirmed. They wrote: "The affirmation is that social transformation must be seen in the context of mission, and never as a long ranger."<sup>216</sup> In highlighting where the mission of the church should focus, Walls and Ross wrote:

The mission of the church must be holistic focusing on the *shalom*, that provides for his human creation as well as for *his* whole creation. A shalom and reaches out to feelings, institutions, thoughts, and action; singing, laughing, crying and hoping; food, and hunger, water and thirst, fatigue and sleep; nakedness and cloths, sickness and

---

<sup>216</sup> Walls and Ross: p62

health, hopelessness and seed of hope. It is a gift of shalom given by the God of love for to all and everyone. God shalom is not an individual gift, it's a community gift.<sup>217</sup>

This shalom, does not focus on one aspect but on many aspects despite your race, color of your skin, gender, or what part of the universe you might find yourself but Walls and Ross added that: "Creation is integrated in God himself and it is impossible to look at one without focusing on the other."<sup>218</sup>

Defining justice and giving affirmation of justice as a mark of mission, Walls and Ross wrote:

Justice as a mark of mission is a fundamental expression of God's search for transformation as a mark of mission and a need to integrate it into our portfolio of mission. By nature, we tend to be conservative and walk on secure paths and by ideology we are exclusivist. We tend to define in order to justify our own ways. We try to protect our zone of affirmation and comfort. We tend to define in order to affirm ourselves and criticize others.<sup>219</sup>

In light of this I will present three aspect of the Bassa society that is being seen as unjust structure by the interviewees; Polygamy and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Gender Balance.

#### **4.5.1 Polygamy**

Wall and Ross talk named factors and structures that make a society to suffer from injustices. In light of that, while not naming Polygamy and Female Genital Mutilation directly, the interviewees believe that they are a part of the unjust structure of the Bassa Society.

The structure of the Bassa people is based on male domination and as such, is applied in the culture of the Bassa people in Liberia. In light of what Walls and Ross call 'justify our ways' polygamy is a practice that is seen to be acceptable by social norms but, however, justifies itself to favour the male gender.

---

<sup>217</sup> Walls and Ross: p62-63

<sup>218</sup> Walls and Ross: p63

<sup>219</sup> Walls and Ross: p64

Polygamy is a marriage where a man often marries, or is married to more than one wife, where there is no marital bond between the women. In most cultures in Liberia, polygamy is officially accepted as a way of life or culture of the people. In fact, it is enshrined by the customary laws of Liberia. Some of the respondents were very strong in their responses to the question on polygamy, while others mildly emphasised that it was the way of life of the people and that it is not peculiar to Liberia or Africa, rather it is a global phenomena. Wall and Ross did not mention this practice. However, they emphasised that there are several aspects of mission that mission in itself is bigger and wider than the five marks. As Carol puts it, “polygamy as it may be called, is the first thing that the church does not accept for one man to marry two wives, most especially in the clergy arena.”<sup>220</sup> However, Carol further said that:

On the indigenous side, you do not have control over your member to tell them that they should not marry two or three wives. Nevertheless, if they traditionally marry two or three wives there is nothing we can do about. When it comes to our clergy women whom we have full control over, we let you know that one man, one woman. When you are going to be ordained in the United Methodist Church, you bring your wife’s picture and your license of marriage, so that we keep them for record purposes.<sup>221</sup>

Nelly explains how the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa handled an issue of a polygamous pastor stressing that:

We had especially one or two cases. Those that were ministers left the ministry and they held to their three wives but were still members of the church. We were gradually talking to them and helped some of them out of that situation. When I worked as a high official in the church in Grand Bassa County, we had a situation where a pastor had three wives. His first wife lived with him for about 24 years because they were old now. His second wife was 12 years and the third and youngest was there for like 5 years. A pastor with three wives is not acceptable in the church and so we had to work with him to divorce two of his

---

<sup>220</sup> Carol, 2012

<sup>221</sup> Carol 2012

wives and support his children of the divorced women. The children are his, he is the head of the family and it's his right to support his children. Eventually he took the children and the first wife became the mother of the other two women's children. The rest of the women were compensated and they were sent back to their parents as free women. After we administered to them, they understood it. They learnt that it was not good for them. The young wife was willing to go back because she had two kids. Since she was young, she went back home and the husband took the two children and is now sending them to Camphor United Methodist Mission School. The second wife had three children; two were older but she was willing to take her last child with her and the husband remains with the rest of the children; they agreed. It was a blessing that the two of them got two different men whom they married and continued with their lives. The first wife that stayed with the pastor for more than twenty years became the mother of the family and they lived happily together. But it was the practice of our people and a lot of them refused to leave it.<sup>222</sup>

Nelly Julia herself, as a United Methodist, dealt with cases that led to the separation of a family that had been united for more than five years. She said that “the man was willing to break out of that cultural cocoon.”<sup>223</sup>

The intervention of the church led to the separation of a family and brought about a divorce. Was the issue of polygamy so serious that it had to bring to an end a family that was happily married for so many years? John Simo said that polygamy is not a serious issue as Nelly sees it but stressed that:

The United Methodist Church is concerned about pastors being married to only one wife. If any has more than one, it has not reached to the attention of the church. Probably, members of the church have more than one wife but the church is continuing the process of teaching them to adhere to the one man one wife life style or doctrine of the church.<sup>224</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> Nelly Julia 2012

<sup>223</sup> Nelly Julia, 2012

<sup>224</sup> John Simo, Interviewed August 15, 2012

On a contrary view of Nelly's opinion that polygamy is a serious problem, John Simo refers to the Old Testament adding that:

Even in biblical times, there were people who had more than one wife: Isaac, Abraham, Jacob, Solomon, just to mention a few. However, it is a gradual process that the church is fighting. I hope and pray that in future leaders of the church will be able to fight against polygamy as well as prostitution, which is a universal practice. There is prostitution and other vices which are not compatible to living, such as homosexuality; man to man, woman to woman, and all those things are practiced that are not compatible to Christians but people seem to glorify them.<sup>225</sup>

Many of the interviewees on the cultural practice of polygamy are in agreement that the practice is a way of life of the people but it is subjected to change based on their Christian faith. Spilo for instance said:

I am a Christian and my personal opinion on this issue of polygamy is that it is not right in the sight of God, so I do not support that as a Christian. I am an African, yes, but I do not support it because my faith does not permit that.<sup>226</sup>

On the question of whether the church has openly condemned the practice of polygamy, Spilo said that:

At church services, you hear some pastors preaching and kicking against it; at conference level, we keep silent and try to be very mute about it. The Liberia Annual Conference has not openly condemned polygamy but I feel that what is wrong in the sight of God is wrong. Once you know it is against your faith and your conscience tells you it is wrong, there is no need to play games about it. There is a need for the church to be vocal about it, there is a need for the church to set the kind of example that others would follow. This is the kind of

---

<sup>225</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>226</sup> Spilo, 2012

Methodist Church I knew in the past; the church that always set the example and other churches follow, and I think we need to continue on that path.<sup>227</sup>

While lay members of the church are strongly speaking against the practice of polygamy, some members of the church in the clergy continue to spell out that it is the culture of the people and that such culture has a biblical heritage. A leading member of the clergy narrated that “polygamy is not a serious issue as homosexuality, lesbian and prostitution that is tearing the world apart and challenging the fabric of the Christian faith.”<sup>228</sup> He pointed out that the practice has a biblical route which was practiced by people in the bible. According to Bayougar:

During those days (days of his father), everything was alright; if you even had ten women here with you at that time, you could not feel it that much but nowadays, if you have two, you may want to run away and go in the bush and live there. You may even want to stay away from the women because of the expenses. Women expenses are not easy,;every day they want to be changing clothes, they want this and that. The cup of rice is not a small a thing to put your foot in that kind of thing, you must therefore know where you are standing<sup>229</sup>

The intervention of the church in the issue of polygamy lead to a dilemma for most churches in Africa. The question of divorce, destitute children and prostitution become issues of concern; N.K Taryor, Sr. Wrote:

The African society which had long been cemented together by extended family and clan structure through polygamy was broken down by missionaries. Both the Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries refuse to accept polygamist in the church as member. They even refuse to baptize them.<sup>230</sup>

J.B. Webster was quoted as saying:

---

<sup>227</sup> Spilo, 2012

<sup>228</sup> John Simo, 2012

<sup>229</sup> Bayougar, Interviewed August, 2012

<sup>230</sup> Taryor, Nya Kwiawon, *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity, the Strugglers' Community Press;2003 W.67<sup>th</sup> Place Chicago, Illinois 60636; 1984:pp 110-111*

From the first moment professional missionaries from Europe and America set foot in Africa, they were confronted with the question of whether or not the marriage customs associated with polygamy were consistent with membership in the Christian church. A majority came to the conclusion that they were not. But once this decision had been taken, the missionaries were faced with what many felt to be a questionable alternative....divorce, fatherless children, destitute women and prostitution. Their dilemma was aptly expressed by one of the pioneers. ‘It is true i had never baptiszd a polygamist, but I have never ventured to cause a divorce.’<sup>231</sup>

In light of John Simo’s argument that interviewees give for perpetuating polygamy is that polygamy is biblical. Hence, I sought to trace the route of polygamy in both the Old and New Testaments. The issue of polygamy in the Old Testament were mainly carried out by patriarchs who took more than one wife. The act was not out rightly condemned by God but was also not allowed for a man to marry more than one wife as seen through the great leaders and icons of the faith.

Polygamy first appeared as a result of the fall of Cain, a cursed son, and Lamech was recorded to be the first man to engage into the practice. There are fifteen examples of polygamy from the time of Lamech to 931 A.D. Thirteen of these men had enough power that no one could call into question their practice, they were unaccountable or no one dared approach them.” Lamech Genesis 4:19; Abraham Genesis 16; Esau Genesis 26:34; 28:9; Jacob Genesis 29:30; Ashur 1 Chronicles 4:5; Gideon Judges 8:30; Elkanah 1 Samuel 1:2; David 1 Samuel 25:39-44; 2 Samuel 3:2-5; 5:13; 1 Chronicles 14:3; Solomon 1 Kings 11:1-8; Rehoboam 2 Chronicles 11:18-23; Abijah 2 Chronicles 13:21; Jehoram 2 Chronicles 21:14; Joash 2 Chronicles 24:3; Ahab 2 Kings 10; Jehoiachin 2 Kings 24:15; Belshazzar Daniel 5:2; 1 Chronicles 2:8; Hosea in Hosea 3:1,2. Polygamy is mentioned in the Mosaic law and made inclusive on the basis of legislation, and continued to be practiced all down through the period of Jewish history to the Captivity, after which there is no instance of it on record (Gen.29:15-30, Jacob and his wives.) Was Abraham, David, Solomon condemned or

---

<sup>231</sup> Taryor, 2004: p111



approved for practicing polygamy? Well they certainly did not get blessed for it! The is fact that every polygamist in the Bible like David and Solomon (1 Chron. 14:3) were punished.<sup>232</sup>

While I am not suggesting that the Old Testament is a part of God's word, the New Testament is a fulfilment of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ is the guiding principal in the New Testament. In fact, I would like to argue that Christianity starts with the New Testament and as such, there is no documented evidence of polygamy found in the New Testament but what is highlighted is marriage in a singular form. For example Paul wrote:

But because of immoralities, each man is to have his wife and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfil his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. (1Corinthians 7:2-3)

This indicates that one man and one woman; if it was acceptable to have more than one wife, wives would have been used instead.

Ephesians 5:22-23 discusses marriage in a plural form. However, it is in plural form because he is writing to the overall group of husbands and wives and not to an individual. "Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her," (Ephesians 5:25). Paul, however, makes it more personal in Ephesians 5:23 "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is also the head of the church, He, Himself being the saviour of the body." When Paul speaks to an individual it is husband and wife; that is one man and one woman. Therefore, the church should make it her duty to teach her members to take on one husband or one wife.

Polygamy was thought of or allowed in the past basically for the protection of women in the society that was male dominated. Women had very limited rights and had to be connected to a man for some basis of social protection. Women in most countries could not obtain property such as land of their own or inherit the property of their parents which was a part of the social structure.

---

<sup>232</sup> <http://www.letusreason.org/Biblexp75.htm>, accessed February 12, 2013

On the other hand, most women given out in marriage were virgins and as such one could be sure that they were highly free from dangerous diseases such as HIV and AIDS that is destroying the lives of millions across the world today.

The economy at that time and a man's wealth were largely depended on the amount of food he could grow at a given farming season, therefore the need for more women and children to help in the process of food production was important. The above facts give some justification as to why the practice of polygamy thrived at the time and was not condemned. Today, however, the tide has changed and women can now own property in most countries of the world, earn their own income, protect themselves under the law, and do not need a man for protection as was done in the past.

Secondly, the prime reason for the practice of polygamy to be stopped was based on the facts that there are many sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS that is perpetrated by multiple sexual partners and premarital sex.

Unlike in the past where there was pride in a woman losing her virginity to her husband. Today, it is most likely not the case as most girls are likely to be involved in premarital sex thus, posing a serious risk in taking in a man's second wife. Another member in a polygamous family of ten who contracts the sexually transmitted HIV virus could lead to a whole family being swept out by the AIDS pandemic.

The AIDS pandemic threaten the lives of most polygamous families especially in Africa, where promiscuity is high and families are not sure of people they are having sexual relationships with and are also not willing to use condoms to prevent themselves from the diseases. For example, a man with four wives spent a week in a month to have sex with one wife. During the other three to four weeks, the other three wives lie vulnerable to extra marital relationships, which could endanger the whole family because the man will have to sleep with all of them eventually. While others are looking at the practice to be a cultural aspect of many societies, polygamy should also be looked at from an economic standpoint of today As Baryougar rightly puts it, in the days of old, it was appropriate to have such an

aspect of culture but with the economic constraints it is difficult for a man to cater to one wife.

#### **4.5.2 Female Genital Mutilation**

As in the case of polygamy, Female Genital Mutilation is a practice that is carried out on girls and women which prepares them for marriage. In most cases indigenous people believed that the man will not marry to a woman who is not clean (that is, who has not been mutilated). The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC), threaten the lives of women and girls there are grave after effect just to satisfy a man's desire for a clean wife. For this thesis, the term FGM will be used.

I have chosen to leave this part of the transcription as it is without any editing, to get the right views of the people without any interpretation, which will come later in the discussion chapter. According to Baryoumah, one of the interviewees and a victim of female genital mutilation condemn it and said that "FGM is not good".<sup>233</sup> What made her to say that the act is not good is because, according to her "It looks like I cannot satisfy any man in bed because I myself do not know the feeling of sex."<sup>234</sup> She explains her difficulty or painful experience, in what she had to endure in the Sande Bush in these words:

I stayed three for months and came out but what I remember is that we were kept in a town that the sandy bush was in because our town was not where they had the sandy bush. Some cousins of ours had to rebuild the sandy bush in our town and we stayed in the town for about two weeks and they told us that we were going back to the next town to visit our aunts. Before we could think, we found ourselves in the middle of the forest, already undressed (stripped) and taken one after the other to a far distance. When you finally get close, you will see a group of women and children clapping and singing so that no one hears a sound of your cry and shout when your clitoris is being cut off. We were guarded by people who monitored us and treated us from the severe bleeding. According to my aunt, I was deeply cut and it took more than a month for my wound to heal while others took 2-3 weeks. In the process of cutting off the

---

<sup>233</sup> Baryouman, Interviewed August 15, 2012

<sup>234</sup> Baryoumah, 2012

clitoris, they do not numb you, so you feel severe pain. Just imagine someone taking razor or a knife and cutting you and afterwards there is no medical treatment besides the traditional herbs. The healing process takes very long and the pain continues for that period of time. It is bad and I do not want to blame my parents who committed this act against me, but I will never allow my daughter to go through the process of FGM.<sup>235</sup>

Baryoumah further explained that the practice still has an after effect on her life since she carried it out more than thirty years ago. She explains:

In Africa, women shower together. I am normally ashamed to shower amongst my friends for fear that I might be noticed. When we are discussing in our women gatherings about men and women relationship, I do not say anything because I have no feelings about it.<sup>236</sup>

Baryoumah remembered her ordeal about her initiation in the Sande Society and though more than thirty years had passed, it seems like her experience still terrified her. She explained that:

We were dressed up and escorted to the bush, deep in the forest where no one could hear your voice, in order not to allow others to hear you as you shout and cry in agony. Other girls who have passed through the process assemble to sing while the surgery goes on. You are held by older women while one will look between your legs with a knife. I tell you my friend, it is one of the most terrible pains that I had gone through in my life. It is done as soon as you arrive in the bush so that you might not escape. I laid helpless in the bush for more than a month and bleeding for several weeks; it was just by the grace of God that I survived. My aunts and family members in the bush gave up on me and thought that I would die. But as I said, by the grace of God I am alive.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> Baryoumah, 2012

<sup>236</sup> Bayormah, 2012

<sup>237</sup> Baryoumah, 2012

Baryoumah, who has one daughter lamented that she can never allow her child to pass through such a horrific encounter adding that: "I can never send my child in the Sande bush to go through the pains that I went through, that almost claimed my life, and can never encourage anyone else to go there."<sup>238</sup>

According to Spilo:

The practice can be abolished if proper teaching is done and if the church plays a leading role in petitioning the government to ensure that certain age groups should not be allowed to participate in the practice of FGM. Secondly, people should not be forced by parents or relatives or coerced in any way to join in the practice. Workshops and seminars should be held to educate the youth on the danger of FGM, which may be minimized.

Notwithstanding, Spilo elaborated that:

FGM is a serious problem; but it is not a problem that can be worked on or solved just in a day's time. It has to do with the culture of our people; they need the kind of education; now remember you need to look at the illiteracy rate of Liberia.<sup>239</sup>

The issue of culture has a lot of aspects and it is very important to take note when dealing with issues such as FGM. Some, like Abago, feel that those who advocate for the abolition of the people's culture are being influenced by the white man. He went on to say that:

Culture has lot a of aspects and one of them is the Poro Society and Sandy Society for the Bassa people. They call it *Mah-Gba* (Sande Society for women) and *Gar-gba* (Poro Society for men). The poro and sandy societies are purely institutional; there is fertility; you join it for life so you can be a member. But in the Bassa tradition which they call *Mah-Gba* or *Gar-Gba*, as soon as you

---

<sup>238</sup> Baryoumah, 2012

<sup>239</sup> Spilo, 2012

graduate from there, you become Alumni. You are not obligated to go back there again so we call it an institution. But the white man came and instead of preaching the gospel, they attacked the people's culture.<sup>240</sup>

Acknowledging that culture has some flaws at times, Abago added that:

Even though there are other things that are not good, and I am not saying that everything in the culture is good, but they are open for development. Every primitive culture is for development not for eradication; that's how every nation started with their primitive cultures. What did they do – they developed it into civilization, why can't we do that?<sup>241</sup>

While Abago is thinking of ways to transform the primitive nature of the Poro and Sande societies of the culture, Nelly's view is that "no matter how much you teach the people, it will not abolish the practice of Female Genital Mutilation."<sup>242</sup>

Spilo, in some ways differ from Nelly and sees teaching as the way forward in dealing with the practice of FGM, adding that:

FGM it is a cultural issue but the people need to be given the kind of education that will enlighten them on the danger of the practice and convince them to change. It is a piece of work (difficult job) to do and let me remind you of the difficulty. The people feel that this is our culture and you cannot play around it, it was handed down to us a hundreds of years ago. What do you know about it? Why play around it? You will have to explain it to us in the bush.<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Abago 2012

<sup>241</sup> Abago, 2012

<sup>242</sup> Nelly Julia, 2012

<sup>243</sup> Spilo, 2012

Explaining it in the bush is what makes Carol to say that “talking about the practice of Female Genital Mutilation is a taboo,”<sup>244</sup> for fear that you might be called upon to talk about what you know of the practice to those who practice it out in the bush.

Most of the interviewees hardly wanted to comment on the issue and as such wanted to be sure of the person they were talking to on the matter. Some of the interviewees pointed out the difficulty in abolishing this dangerous culture practice, emphasising that it is based on the structure of the Liberian government itself, where many people in the government especially in the National Legislature, do not have the political will to pass legislation to abolish the act. Spilo, for example highlighted that:

The act is rooted in the society from top to bottom. As you speak against it, there are ministers in government, members of parliament, even some clergy members that might go around and ask what you said Sincerely, if the kind of education that can persuade the people is provided like the danger related to HIV and AIDS and other kinds of diseases and complications, there might be a solution to the problem. The United Methodist Church in Liberia has not come out with a position on the abolition of FGM. Very few pastors might preach on these things but for it to become an official position of the church to condemn it has not happened; except for human rights organizations, to be honest with you.<sup>245</sup>

Bayougar, a non-Methodist traditionalist laughed when the practice was mentioned and said that the practice and the entire Sande Society needed to be looked at. He explained that he has several children but has encouraged them to go to academic schools instead of the bush schools. Pointing to my rented Nissan Station Wagon, parked under the big mango tree, the traditionalist further lamented that:

The academic school allows you to be successful and enjoy life. It affords a child the opportunity to own a car and a beautiful house. But the traditional schools do not offer the same opportunity, it ends right after the sande bush.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> Nelly Julia, Interviewed July 29, 2012

<sup>245</sup> Spilo, 2012

<sup>246</sup> Bayougar, 2012

It was very astonishing to hear a traditionalist, one who upholds the culture of the people to speak with such a tone on why church leaders still hold that FGM as the culture of the people. The fact that such a man could raise his voice in such a strong way in opposition to the act, though it is seen very difficult by most of the interviewees and based it on culture, there is a hope that with efforts from the church and other international bodies, there can be transformation of this dangerous cultural practice that has claimed the lives of many young girls.

The church supports culture and cultural diversity and as such female genital mutilation is a part of the culture of the people, one might argue that there is no need for the church to condemn a culture that is so dear to the hearts of the people. It is a well considered point, but a culture that threatens the lives of the innocent, maiming or cutting body parts in a brutal and ruthless way for no medical reasons, and denying women of the God given sexual feelings all in the name of culture, should be questionable by the church as well as human rights organizations.

In the basic teachings of the church, the Bible clearly states that “You shall not kill” (Exodus 20: 13). Killing is condemned in the strongest terms; hence the practice that leads to the death of many future members of the church and state in the name of culture should be the concern of the United Methodist church in Liberia.

All of the interviewees of the United Methodist church on this matter said that it is the culture of the people and therefore no action has been taken. It is true that change takes a long time and teaching is necessary for the change. According to John Simo, Nike J, Jonathan Day, Spilo and Nelly, all Methodists, and Joshua Smith a politician and non- Methodist, how will change come when they are afraid to openly engage the evilness of the practice? Most of the interviewees did not want a deep conversation on the matter as they were too afraid to talk about the FGM, especially in the interior parts of Grand Bassa County, because it is linked to the powerful Sande Society.

Baryoumah is a Christian today, is serving God and is a leading figure in her church but want someone to stop the practice of FGM. J. Koko, like Baryoumah says that there is a need to



stop the practice but who to take the lead is the question that needs an answer. He explain that:

The smaller churches like the Mai Baptist Church has been in the hobby of condemning the practice of FGM but it needs larger denominations like the United Methodist Church to join the condemnation in a more stronger term.<sup>247</sup>

All of the interviewees and respondents agreed that the issue of Female Genital Mutilation is deeply rooted in the culture of the people and will be difficult, if not impossible to stop. However, as mentioned before, FGM, according to those who are involved, speak about the shame and embarrassments they faced in falling into a relationship with someone who is not a member of the society (Sandy society). They also speak about the danger of the operation being performed and the aftermath of the operation. J. Andrew Kirk wrote:

We can evangelize, engage in dialogue, work for justice and the care of the environment, be peace-builders and share in partnership with other communities. The relationship to culture is of different order...nevertheless, the matter of culture affects every aspect of mission<sup>248</sup>

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) female genital mutilation includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The procedure has no health benefits for girls and women.

FGM can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, infertility as well as complications in childbirth, increased risk of new born deaths. It has been carried out on about 140 million girls and women worldwide and they currently living with the consequences. FGM is mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and age of 15.<sup>249</sup>

The World Health Organization also highlight that beside the traditional circumcisers, whom often play other central roles in communities, such as attending childbirths, “18% of all FGM

---

<sup>247</sup> Koko J, 2012

<sup>248</sup> Kirk: 1999; p75

<sup>249</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

is performed by health care providers, and this trend is increasing.”<sup>250</sup> Looking at the implication on the world stage the report said that:

FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the genders, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It violates of the rights of children and the practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.<sup>251</sup>

Female genital mutilation is classified into four major types.

- “Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals) and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).
- Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are "the lips" that surround the vagina).
- Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.
- Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area”.<sup>252</sup>

The causes of female genital mutilation include a mix of cultural, religious and social factors within families and communities. There are various reasons for upholding the practice of FGM according to a survey conducted by the UNICEF. Among the many reasons are cultural, religious and social causes as demonstrated below:

Where FGM is a social convention, the social pressure to conform to what others do and have been doing is a strong motivation to perpetuate the practice; it is often considered a necessary part of raising a girl properly, and a way to

<sup>250</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

<sup>251</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

<sup>252</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

prepare her for adulthood and marriage. FGM is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered proper sexual behaviour, linking procedures to premarital virginity and marital fidelity. FGM is in many communities believed to reduce a woman's libido and therefore believed to help her resist "illicit" sexual acts.<sup>253</sup>

Female genital mutilation is also associated to cultural ideologies, according to the WHO report:

FGM is associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty, which include the notion that girls are "clean" and "beautiful" after removal of body parts that are considered "male" or "unclean".<sup>254</sup>

While there are no religious scripts that prescribe the practice, practitioners often believe the practice has religious support because: "Religious leaders take varying positions with regard to FGM: some promote it, some consider it irrelevant to religion, and others contribute to its elimination."<sup>255</sup>

Local structures of power and authority, such as community leaders, religious leaders, circumcisers, peer pressure, and even some medical personnel can contribute to upholding the practice. In most societies where, FGM is practice it considered a cultural tradition, which is often used as an argument for its continuation. While others adopt the practice by copying the traditions of neighbouring groups.

Growing up in my home town many years ago, I remember how people celebrated the graduation of a boy or girl from the sande and poro societies. A family could hold a party for three days to a week and incurring huge debts to make sure that the ceremony was a success. But the same family could not afford to spend a tenth on what they spent on the sandy bush school to send their children to academic school.

Notwithstanding, there were others who could not celebrate or openly mourn because their child left in the bush on grounds that they left in the belly of the devil. Something Bayourmah

---

<sup>253</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

<sup>254</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

<sup>255</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved February 12, 2012

denied and blames the deaths of children on the procedure operation that is carried out in the sande bush. However, according to Nelly Julia:

The act is deeply rooted in the culture of the Bassa people and can never actually be abolished hundred percent; no matter how you speak, and no matter how you teach it. I mean, culture, when it comes to culture in every nation, in every village and every tribe, they do have their culture and they are tied to certain cultural act that just cannot be abolished. You may teach them what is right, it may reduce but cannot be abolished and that is what it is with FGM and our people.<sup>256</sup>

The WHO has stated that the issue once deeply rooted in what people might refer to as cultural, will have a long battle but believes that eliminating the practice will have to be of the goodwill of the communities involved.

In some areas the difficulty to fight against the practice of female genital mutilation stems from the facts that it is a “vote catcher” in some countries such as Sierra Leone.”<sup>257</sup> For some politicians and political parties and even independent government officials could lose votes if they were to fight to abolish the practice.

#### **4.5.3 The United Methodist Church response to Social Injustices**

Statistics has shown in Liberia that educated and civilized women have better rights than and indigenous and uneducated woman. In a bid to tackle some of the social issues created gender disparity in Grand Bassa County, The United Methodist Church has taken some stance aimed at addressing the problem. The UMC has encourage both boys and girls to go to school since educated women suffer less abuse and protection under the laws of Liberia.

According to Spilo:

I know of two of the Methodist schools in Buchanan, the WPL Brumskine United Methodist School and the J.C. Early United Methodist Junior High

<sup>256</sup> Nelly Julia Interviewed July 29, 2012

<sup>257</sup> <http://www.trust.org/trustlaw/blogs/the-word-on-women/eliminating-female-genital-mutilation-finally-we-are-making-real-progress-globally/> Accessed February 27, 2013

School. There are lots of scholarships that come for girls as well as for boys. Those scholarships, once they come, the school considers gender balance. J.C. Early is one of the schools that I know of that offers scholarships too. It is just the matter of those females taking advantage of the opportunity that they have to prepare themselves for the future.<sup>258</sup>

Nelly, a United Methodist also agrees with Spilo and explained that:

The UMC is engaged in educating both boys and girls through college, especially when they maintain a 'B' average from high school. Most of the time the United Methodist Church in Buchanan recruits young girls especially those that are willing to go to school and give them scholarships, sometimes from elementary through to college level.<sup>259</sup>

Nelly Julia further elaborated that the United Methodist Church in Bassa recruited and awarded more than six girls and fourteen young men with scholarships to study at universities in Liberia and most of them graduated from the United Methodist University in recent times with bachelor's degrees in various disciplines. Nelly continued to explain that:

The UMC recruits girls and boys from villages as a church and send them to Camphor Mission United Methodist Mission in Tubmanville Township, District #3, Grand Bassa County. We give them scholarships from elementary level up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and if they maintain a 'B' average, we bring them to town and send them to Brumskine United Methodist High School. I think the Church has done more than hundred percent because recently, we graduated over ten from Cuttington University with masters' degrees in various disciplines.<sup>260</sup>

The issue of gender is a new phenomenon in Africa and Liberia is of no exception. In countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and other African Countries, Patriarchy or male domination was and is still the custom of the people of old and even up and until today.

---

<sup>258</sup> Spilo, 2012

<sup>259</sup> Nelly Julia, 2012

<sup>260</sup> Nelly, 2012

According to IDLO, an intergovernmental organization that promotes legal, regulatory and institutional reform to advance economic and social development in transitional and developing countries. “Poverty has a female face and female account for the highest poverty ratio in most parts of the developing world.”<sup>261</sup>

Female account for the highest chunk of poverty in the developing world as indicated by the IDLO report:

Of the 1.5 billion people living on US\$1 per day or less, 70 percent are female. Girl children in particular, represent an extremely vulnerable group in many societies, often existing outside the rule of law and, in some cases, domestic laws and enforcement mechanisms themselves serving as a source of oppression.<sup>262</sup>

There are a lot of Systematic disadvantage including health, nutrition and the burden of household tasks, has perpetuated gender disparities and inequalities, particularly in the developing world. Gender discrimination greatly interferes with a girl’s ability to develop and, ultimately, their ability to live their lives in dignity.

From a long-term economic development perspective, discrimination against girls means that a significant proportion of the population will be unable to participate in the economy as productive adults. On the other hand, improvements in women’s economic positions have proven to have a positive spin-over effect on the social welfare of their children. Local cultural and traditions sets the agenda for structure and social abuses and discrimination against women.<sup>263</sup>

As my late grandmother narrated stories to us as little children, women were not allowed to stand up straight before her husband, or to give him food while standing. The woman had to be on her knees when entering in the presence of her husband and while serving food to a man. It was so funny to hear and it sounded very weird.

---

<sup>261</sup> [http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport\\_final.pdf](http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport_final.pdf), Accessed March 10, 2013

<sup>262</sup> [http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport\\_final.pdf](http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport_final.pdf), Accessed March 10, 2013

<sup>263</sup> [http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport\\_final.pdf](http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport_final.pdf), Accessed March 10, 2013

According to the custom, it was a mark of respect to the man as the head of the family. In fact, women in Zimbabwe as I was told in class lectures at Africa University cannot own land and in few times past could not own a bank account. The fact was revealed when I was in Zimbabwe and Malawi respectively, that the women, even in church presenting gifts to a man in a program or when they had to serve a meal during a fellowship, women had to be on their knees to wash the hands of the men who were to partake in the meal. The situation in Liberia in general and especially amongst traditional women is not much different.

According to the IDLO research on Liberia, traditional women are subjected to abuse and denied to own property. This denial of female property rights is perpetrated by the customary laws of Liberia which gives property rights to the deceased family especially in the traditional setting.<sup>264</sup>

In the absence of official statistics, Reeves estimates about one third of Liberia's 3.5 million people are disinherited women and children, constrained by rural customary law that classifies wives as property and consequently blocked from inheriting land.

In 2003, the Association of the Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) finally pushed through inheritance legislation securing for widows – regardless of their civil or traditional marriages – the right to a one-third total of their husband's property, with the remainder divided among their children.

Deweh Gray, AFELL's determined president says: "The Challenges are great because people had this life for over a century and getting them to, especially the male folks, to accept this change, what they see as a radical change in their lives is difficult. First, we had to simplify this law into simple English. And we are now translating it into the local languages. And taking it out to the rural areas where this form of marriage is predominant."<sup>265</sup>

The IDLO research here shows some of the harsh conditions that women undergo as a result of the kind customary laws that are in place in Liberia.

---

<sup>264</sup> [http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport\\_final.pdf](http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport_final.pdf), Accessed March 10, 2013

<sup>265</sup> <http://www.ips.org/mdg3/agriculture-liberiaaposs-land-just-for-some/>, accessed March 19, 2013

Hawa was young and shy when she married her husband in Lofa County. The second of ultimately three wives, Hawa laboured all day on their rice farm and bore him nine children. On the morning her husband was shot dead by Taylor's rebels, Hawa fled across the border to Guinea with her children.

After the war I went back to the village and the farm. But my husband's family said the land was not for me, and my in-laws ordered me to burn our house down." Hawa fears the threat of witchcraft against her. "As a woman I have no power," she trails off, stuck on the loom in front of her. "I don't want to go back there," she says. "I want some different land. I am scared of them."<sup>266</sup>

In civil law marriage, one third of the man's property is inherited by the wife and the rest belongs to the children; however, it also depends if the deceased left a will.

However the The pervasive nature of customary law remains an impediment to women and girls' enjoyment of the property rights afforded to them by national law in Liberia.

Customary norms perpetuate the weak nature of women's role in the ownership and management of property, further entrenching their dependence on male relatives and increasing their risk of exploitation. Economic independence prior to marriage, including through the assertion of property rights, is essential to ensuring the protection of women's rights, particularly in the event of widowhood or dissolution of marriage.<sup>267</sup>

The violation of the basic rights such as property rights stems from the fact that most affected women and children who are abused in ways such as property denial and education are properties of the man in themselves and one property cannot own another property.

Girls were and still are today in most cases not prioritized in receiving education compared to the boys in most rural families. In most of the traditional cultures of Liberia and the Bassa culture is of no exception, women are said to be property of the man. This can be explained

---

<sup>266</sup> <http://www.ips.org/mdg3/agriculture-liberiaaposs-land-just-for-some/>, accessed March 19, 2013

<sup>267</sup> [http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport\\_final.pdf](http://www.idlo.int/doccalendar/liberiareport_final.pdf), Accessed March 10, 2013



from the fact that women, whose husbands died, are given to a brother or an immediate relative of the deceased husband.

In most cases women work harder in earning the property which are taken away from them as a result of the gender disparity. The burden of all of the domestic work lies squarely in the hands of the female while the male relaxes doing nothing or playing cards, draft or local games.

The household chores for an ordinary woman in most traditional homes in Liberia include: fetching water sometimes from a distance of two or more kilometres, fetching fire wood, if there is a baby in the home - bathing the baby, making breakfast, sweeping the compound on a daily basis, washing the man's clothes, cooking lunch, cleaning up the house, ironing the cloths, going to do farming work such as planting vegetables, cassava or rice, weeding the farm, preparing supper and doing anything that is to be done in the home. According to women, girls are being prepared to take up the challenges in their marital homes. In essence, if the timing for every domestic work was to be calculated, a real African woman work more than twenty hours per day everyday especially when she is caring for a baby.

Besides the demanding household work, traditional or uneducated women are taught not to refuse their husbands desire for sex no matter how tired they might be.

From my observation, the United Methodist Church is dealing with the issue of structural abuse in a very active way. Observing that educated women are mostly to have more rights in the society, the church is educating more and more girls who might stand up for their rights against the unjust structure of society. Secondly, the church is educating women and giving them the necessary empowerment on their rights so that they can take the necessary precautionary measures in defending themselves against their husbands or their husband's families.

#### **4.6 Safeguarding the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth**

During the 1980s, there were beautiful T-shirts printed in Liberia with the warning of the decline of the Ozone layer. For most Liberians like me, this was just clothing and something to frighten the people, especially when there were rumors of holds being created in the Ozone. These rumors frightened me each time it was mentioned or I read about it and the eventual consequences it would have done on the earth. There were talks about earthquakes, sea water rise, flooding, drought and decrease in the rainfall but, there was very little that we knew was the very cause of all the talks that were going around and what could be done to stop such a crisis. How could the church help in resolving such a crisis?

One of the outstanding missionary of our times and the founder of modern missionary movement, William Carey is remembered as not just as a missionary but as a successful and passioante naturalist. He was noted for literating the campus of Serampur College with large native fruit trees.<sup>268</sup>

When I first visited the United Methodist Church Retreat Center in Whiteplains, Montserrado County Liberia in 1989, the compound was littered with fruit trees of all kinds. At that time and at the point of this research, I did not understand why it was important.

Mission history often underplay the contribution of native Christians. In many cases, the local knowledge of habitants, ecosystems, and soil types were actually preserved rather than destroyed by mission, and particularly by local mission converts. For example, St. Joseph.

In Sunday school, we learnt about the creation of the world and how we were caretakers of the world that God gave to us for us to use it to support and sustain our lives.

"Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man he had formed." (Genesis 2:8)

Evidently the world was in a wild, unrefined state when the first man was created. Although fully functioning ecosystems existed, to make it hospitable, some preparations were

---

<sup>268</sup> Walls and Ross, 1999: p96

necessary. Once the man had been given a good start, care taking responsibilities were passed on to him, as plainly stated in verse Genesis 2:15.

The current series of ecological crisis – of which human-induced climate change is merely the most obvious - is causing mission not to react, but also to rethink at the deepest level. We lived in a world today where our interactions with nature are having a profound effect not just on our environment, but on us as the human species, such that they called everything we do in mission into question.

The United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County, according to Carol, has not done much when it comes to the fourth mark of mission. She said “apart from the planting of fast growing forest trees on most of the United Methodist Church property, and the church prays to God to stop the sea erosion that is undermining the city of Buchanan which has engulfed one of its edifices in Korkor-wein, where the sea erosion in the county is at its height, there is not any project that one can speak of in terms of this aspect of mission.”<sup>269</sup> The fact is that most of the interviewees were not aware of the fifth mark of mission and if they knew anything related to it, they were not sure how it concerned the UMC. However, Nike J pointed out that:

Apart from praying about the sea erosion in the county, “the United Methodist Church Human Right Monitor is engaged is advocating against the dumping of waste created by the Firestone Rubber Plantation Company in Owengrove, Grand Bassa County and is demanding compensation for polluting the rivers and stream in the area.”<sup>270</sup>

The rivers and streams provide basic water supply for the people. Nike J. said:

The United Methodist Church Human Rights Monitor has been speaking against Firestone Pollution especially in the Bassa Mechline River banks in the Owensgrove District area of Grand Bassa County. As a result of constant advocacy, Firestone has agreed to dialogue with the people of Grand Bassa

---

<sup>269</sup> Carol 2012

<sup>270</sup> Nike J., 2012

County to see how best they can settle those things that they have destroyed including the water. What can they do, what can they provide to be able to replace the level of damage they have caused for the people of Bassa? Like for example, constructing hand pumps in that area so that that can meet the social needs of the people. The issue of school, education facilities, hospitals and all of those things so their dialogue is on going; we had the first meeting and another is scheduled soon.<sup>271</sup>

According to Carol:

The UMC in Grand Bassa County is also engaged in planting rubbering trees. Those trees we are planting, we want for them to grow naturally, not applying any kind of chemical to them, because when chemicals are added, even though the trees will get a faster growth, it could also destroyed those little guys in the soil, something we are to protect, you know.<sup>272</sup>

The first four marks of mission have to be reexamined as we wake up to the obvious truth that nature is in the context of all that we do and are.

- Evangelism (proclaiming the Good News) needs to grapple in its apologetics with the accusation that Christianity has nothing helpful to say about today's biggest question-how to have a sustainable relationship with planet earth. Indeed we also have to overcome the widely held perception that Christianity is to blame for the ecological crisis, through placing humanity as 'the image of God' on a pedestal above the rest of nature. It is a claim that is straightforward to refute theologically, but will people listen unless they see practical evidence of Christians taking care of the earth?
- Discipleship (teaching, baptizing, and nurturing) must move beyond, resourcing people's relationship with God and neighbor, to include our relationship with the land and the fellow creatures whose welfare we have been entrusted with.

---

<sup>271</sup> Nike J., United Methodist in 40s, Interviewee August 15, 2012

<sup>272</sup> Carol, 2012

The United Methodist Church in Liberia teaches about stewardship and responsibility of each United Methodist to God's creation. However, the church falls short on suggesting how to protect God's creation that is slowly but surely being destroyed.

- Responding to human need in loving service is increasingly becoming a self defeating task unless we address the root cause of those human needs. As Bangladeshi relief worker, Nazmul Chowdbury bluntly states: 'Forget about making poverty history – climate change will make poverty permanent.'

When one looks back just a decade ago in Grand Bassa County, production of major food crops were very high, the rains were stable and the farmers knew just when to start clearing the land for the planting season. Today, however, it is difficult to predict the rightful time to start planting, resulting in the crops being planted too soon or too late.

Then the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to Cultivate it and Guard it" ("to tend and care for it" (The Living Bible Genesis 2:15)

Such care likely also included a sort of wildlife management, as shown by the responsibility given to Adam of naming the creatures, as described in verses 19 and 20.

So he took some soil from the ground and formed all the animals and all the birds. Then he brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and that is how they all got their names." - Genesis 2:19, 20

So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, 'Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. Genesis 1:27, 20.

We learnt that everything was given to us to use as food; fish of the sea, birds of the air, animals and plants as well. Then God said: I give you every seed bearing plant on the face

of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit and seed within it. They will be your food.  
(Gen. 1:29)

We learnt that we are caretakers of everything that lives. In academic schools we learnt about our country's major imports and exports but what we did not learn was that our very imports and exports, like the massive destruction of the forest to get logs for exports and timbers for the construction of our homes and making of furniture and waste from the processing of rubbers and clearing of large fields for mining, Iron Ore, Gold, Diamond, contributed to the destruction of God's earth that he gave us in the genesis account to take care of. We did not learn that these exports such as logs and the ships that brought in our needed imports and carry out our much needed exports, were some of the contributing factors to the problems of our world today and was causing us not to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustaining and renewal of the life of the earth. What does safeguarding the integrity of creation sustaining and renewing the life of the earth has to do with the church?

Creation is a symphony of material and life cycles empowered by Earth's star, the sun, whose energy drives global circulations of air and water--flows shaped by unequal heating and varied topography of land above and below the sea.<sup>273</sup>

Solar energy captured by green plants fuels molecule-to-molecule and organism-to-organism transfers, helping to weave Earth's integrative bio-geographic and trophic fabric that interlaces all life. Its creatures produce and consume, multiply and diminish, develop and decompose, each with peculiar roles in sustaining biospheric integrity.<sup>274</sup>

This is Creation's economic fabric—Creation's Economy. "As we human creatures are part of this fabric we also are its stewards—stewards of this symphonic gift, stewards with divine appointments to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Unfolding in the canon of Scripture, vindicated in Christ's resurrection,

---

<sup>273</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p84

<sup>274</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p84

and celebrated in the Holy Eucharist, this economy is the comprehensive contemporary context of Christian mission.<sup>275</sup>

God, in making the universe had a special plan for its usage. In these various versions of Gen.2:15, the Hebrew word, ‘abad’ is translated “work,” “till,” “dress,” and “serve.” We know from experience that gardens (and the biosphere) serve us—with good food, beauty, flavourful herbs, useful fibre, healing remedies, pleasant microclimates, soil-making, nutrient processing, and seed production.

The biosphere provides “ecosystem services”—including water purification by evaporation and percolation, moderation of flood peaks and drought flows by riverine wetlands, development of soils from weathering of rocks, and moderation of local climates by large water bodies. Yet, Genesis addresses our service to the garden. Service from the garden to us is implicit; service from us to the garden is explicit. What is expected of Adam, and of us, is returning the service of the garden with service of our own: a reciprocal service—a con-service, a con-servancy, and a con-servation. This reciprocal service defines an engaging relationship between garden and gardener; between the biosphere and its human safe-guarders.<sup>276</sup>

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth” the fifth mark of mission has been part and parcel of the human task since creation through Adam. This mark was affirmed by God’s covenant with every living creature (Gen. 9), was made right through the sacrificial service of the Son of Adam, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15), and incorporated in the Great Commission. God’s love, expressed in the inexpressible gift of the Son of Man, brings hope for the whole creation—equipping people everywhere to serve and to safeguard the garden of God.<sup>277</sup>

---

<sup>275</sup> Walls and Ross, 2008: p84

<sup>276</sup> [http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/11301/Safeguard\\_Renew\\_-\\_Lambeth.pdf](http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/11301/Safeguard_Renew_-_Lambeth.pdf), Accessed March 1, 2013

<sup>277</sup> [http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/11301/Safeguard\\_Renew\\_-\\_Lambeth.pdf](http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/11301/Safeguard_Renew_-_Lambeth.pdf), Accessed March 1, 2013

My assessment of the interviewees reasoned to me that there is a lot to be done when it comes to the fifth mark of mission. Most of the interviewees only mentioned that they knew the effect of global warming that is the sea erosion that is undermining the city of Buchanan in Grand Bassa County and the irregular climatic condition of Grand Bassa which is making it very difficult for farming.



## 5 Conclusion

In this project I approached the topic on how people perceived the work of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County Liberia by interviewing twelve respondents in Grand Bassa County, in the context of global mission as outlined by Walls and Ross *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*.

In Chapter One of this thesis, research problem and research objectives and questions were presented together with a brief overview of the literature and methodology to be used. Ethical consideration was also introduced as well as justification of the study and a presentation of its limitations.

In Chapter Two, a presentation of the theory was considered to be appropriate for a conceptual framework for the study. Walls and Ross' Five Marks of Mission were presented for a better understanding of how people perceived the working of the UMC in the transformation of lives in Grand Bassa County, Liberia. Based on this, I gave a description of what transformation was and related the aspect of transformation to the marks of mission.

Chapter Three afforded the opportunity for a more detailed explanation of the methods used in the research such as research design, sample size, data analysis method, etc. The reflection of the field work in Grand Bassa County, Liberia and the presentation of the interviewees and of how the field in Grand Bassa looks, were also taken into consideration.

Chapter Four contains thematic presentation of the data collected with discussion and analysis.

Based on the above, I will now give a brief conclusion on the study and thus make some recommendations in line with the five marks of global mission. I will look with each mark as perceived by the people of Grand Bassa County in line with the United Methodist Church.

1. To proclaim the good news of the kingdom
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture the new believers
3. To respond to human needs by loving service

4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>278</sup>

And the research question: To what degree do people in Grand Bassa County in Liberia think that the United Methodist Church has participated in the transformation of life in the County? I would like to conclude by saying that: To a larger extent, the United Methodist Church has participated in the transformation of lives of the Bassa people. What stood up was that the first, second and third marks of mission the United Methodist Church have achieved a great deal to the delight of the people.

In the first mark of mission, it is evident that the church is proclaiming the gospel. This is evident from the number of United Methodist Churches and their membership. Statistics from the districts in Grand Bassa County show that there are over 12,000 United Methodists spreading across the county, 118 pastors, and 52 churches. Eleven schools, 4 clinics and groundbreaking for a multipurpose hospital has taken place. Nelly Julia for example said that the mission of the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County is to preach the Gospel and win souls for Jesus Christ. At the same time Koko J and John Simo are in a bitter rivalry over the method of proclamation. Koko J believes that proclamation is all about criticizing and condemning the county and national leadership in Liberia for the ills in the Bassa county while John Simo is opting for a dialogue rather than confrontation. However Jonathan Day sees proclamation to be linked to service, providing school, hospital, etc. Whatever the style, one thing that stands out is that the United Methodist Church in Grand Bassa County is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the second mark of mission, it can also be deduced that the UMC is baptising new converts and is carrying out teaching through its Sunday Schools and Bible Study programs in each local church on the district. The church is also nurturing, not just new believers but all members continue to go through the process of nurturing and continuously feed for spiritual

---

<sup>278</sup> Walls Andrew and Ross Cathy, *Mission In The 21ST Century, Exploring The Five Marks Of Global Mission*; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1 Spencer Court 140-142 Wands worth High Street London SW184JJ; 2008: p xiv

growth in the church. The UMC is also baptising its members and joining them in the Christian faith.

Spilo, for example said that the United Methodist Church School in his Llocal church is not just for the local church but has incorporated member from various church and the UMC is teaching and nurturing them in the Gospel. It is a general concensus of the people of Grand Bassa County that the UMC is meeting the second mark of mission.

On the third mark of mission there is an overwhelming agreement that the UMC is carrying meeting human need. This is evident from the people and from the activities of the UMC that the church is responding to human needs through its many programs for liberating the people out of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, provision of clean and safe water for towns and villages throughout Grand Bassa County. More importantly, the church is extending its mission further by connecting roads and bridges in Grand Bassa County that is, bringing relief to the people and enhancing their economic empowerment.

However, the fourth mark of mission 'seeks to transform unjust structures of society,' is seemingly seen by most of the interviewees as a challenging task for the UMC. John Simo is quoted as saying that "The church itself is corrupt and that the church needs to rid itself from those virtues that prevent it from reaching out to the community." However, there is a mixed feeling about the successes that the church made in this area. Jonathan Day, for example, said that the way to show the government that these are the right things to do is when you give an example of yourself. Seeking to transform the unjust structure of society tends to tie in with our style of proclamation. Those who will openly condemn the ills in the society especially in Liberia will be heard, compared to those that go in for dialogue. Secondly, the third mark of mission is link to the people culture and since the UMC is a majority church in the county where its membership is heavily concentrated among the indigenous, the church is very careful in condemning some of the structure of society that could hinder the church from expanding its mission, however, the church is playing a role in teaching and educating both boys and girls that they might stand up to redirect the structure of society, such as FGM and Polygamy.

The fifth mark of mission is something that very few people might have knowledge of in Grand Bassa County. Therefore much needs to be done in awaking people on trying 'to strive

to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’ The UMC will need to educate its members on the essence of global warming and climate change. Not only that, but the church will need to educate people on the prevention and not just how to resolve the issue of climate change. It must be established that the United Methodist are more informed of the working of the church than the non-Methodist, judging from the responses of the Methodists and non-Methodists in answering questions that relates to the church. Secondly, Methodist, especially clergy are more vocal on wanting to see the church condemn the ills and structure of society compared to laity interviewees. But in general, the people of Grand Bassa County perceive the UMC to be participating in the transformation of lives in the county.

## References

### Bibliography:

Ainsworth-Land, George T. *Grow or Die the Unifying Principle of transformation, Reissued Edition*; John Wiley and Son; New York, USA; 1986

Bailey, Emmanuel F. *The History of Methodism in Liberia*, 2009,

Bryman Alan, *Social Research Method 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2011

*Conference Journal of the 175<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church held with Cape Palmas District LAC/UMC, Maryland County, Liberia February 11-17, 2009; p111*

Cox, Lamark J., *Hand Book for Conference, District and Local Church Leaders of The Liberia Annual Conference UMC*; SCP Third World Literature Publishing House, Lithonia, Georgia 30058, USA 1994

Department of Community Services (DCS), Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, accessed from the department, March 12, 2013

*Districts Suoerintendents Reports* delievered at the Kuoo Henty United Methodist Church, Kokoyah District Conference, LAC/UMC, Feburary 6-12, 2012

Hanks Patrick, *Collins dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition*; William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd, Glasgow G4 0NB, 1989

Kirk, Andrew J., *What is Mission? Theological Exploration*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1 Spencer Court, 140-142 wandsworth High Street, London SW184JJ, 2002

- *National Population and Housing Census preliminary Results 2008*

Operation Classroom Coordinator, Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church, August, 2012

Ryen, Anne, *Cross-Cultural interviewing. In Handbook of Interviewing Research: Context and Method*, edited by Margareth S. Stroebe, Wolfgang Stroebe, and Robert O. Hansson, 22-43, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993

Silverman, David, *Doing Qualitative Research, Third Edition* SAGE, Publications Ltd. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP, 2010

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, the United Methodist Publishing House, 201 8th Ave S, Nashville, TN 37203, United States: 2008

Taryor, Nya Kwiawon, *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity*, the Strugglers' Community Press; 2003 W.67<sup>th</sup> Place Chicago, Illinois 60636; 1984

Walls Andrew and Ross Cathy, *Mission In The 21ST Century, Exploring The Five Marks Of Global Mission*; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1 Spencer Court 140-142 Wands worth High Street London SW184JJ; 2008

## **Interviewees**

Abago, in his 80s, a non-Methodist, from Grand Bassa County, interviewed August 10, 2012

Bayorgar, is in his 50s; a traditionalist from Grand Bassa County. August 3, 2012

Carol, is in her 50s; a United Methodist from Grand Bassa County, August 6, 2012

Fredhouse, is in his 40s, a United Methodist working in Grand Bassa County, August 9, 2012

Jonathan Day, is in his 40s; a United Methodist Church from Grand Bassa County, August 14, 2012

Joseph Smith, is in his 40s and a non-Methodist from Grand Bassa County; interviewed July 26, 2012

Koko J, in his 70s and from Grand Bassa County, interviewed in Grand Bassa County, July 29, 2012

Mamie, in her 30s, from Grand Bassa County, Interviewed, August 2, 2012

Nelly Julia, in her 40s, a United Methodist from Grand Bassa County, Liberia; interviewed July 29, 2012

Nike J., United Methodist in his 40s, interviewed in Grand Bassa County, Liberia August 15, 2012

Spilo, a Local government and a United Methodist in Grand Bassa County; in his 40s, Interviewed August 2, 2012

Zoemar, in her 40s, is a member of the United Methodist Church and a victim of cultural practices (FGM). Interviewed August 8, 2012

Informers:

BFC Students Brighter Future Children Rescue Centre all are non-non Methodist, August 4, 2012

Naomi, a non-Methodist, in her 50s, in Grand Bassa County, August 4, 2012

Jueh Ceegar, in his 40s and a Non-Methodist United Methodist interviewed in Grand Bassa County August 7, 2012

## Websites

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia>,, 25.06. 2012

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/female-genital-mutilation/>, 11.10. 2012

<http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/casestudy/n175.xml>, 12.11. 2012

<http://www.fhi360.org/nr/rdonlyres/etl7vogszehu5s4stpzb3tyqlpp7rojv4waq37elpyei3tgmc4ty6dunbccfzxtaj2rvbaubzmz4f/overview1.pdf>: 12.11. 2012

[http://www.mdaszko.com/theoryoftransformation\\_final\\_to\\_short\\_article\\_apr05.pdf](http://www.mdaszko.com/theoryoftransformation_final_to_short_article_apr05.pdf), 15.12.2012

[http://www.nri-inc.org/reports\\_pubs/2005/ConceptsOfTransf2005.pdf](http://www.nri-inc.org/reports_pubs/2005/ConceptsOfTransf2005.pdf), 10.12.2012

<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735/2/>, 17.12. 2012

[http://www.diakonia.org.za/attachments/27\\_The%20Church%20and%20Social%20Transformation.pdf](http://www.diakonia.org.za/attachments/27_The%20Church%20and%20Social%20Transformation.pdf), 17.01. 2013

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255457/harmattan>, retrieved 13.02.2013

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> retrieved 12.02. 2013

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/social-justice.html>, accessed 01.03. 2013

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/civil-rights.html#ixzz2MZh4cq2T>, accessed 01.03.2013

[http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/11301/Safeguard\\_Renew\\_-\\_Lambeth.pdf](http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/11301/Safeguard_Renew_-_Lambeth.pdf), accessed 1.03. 2013

<http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/monographs/no44/ecomog.html>, accessed 28.03. 2013



<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/social-justice.html#ixzz2MZgCMFVp> accessed 03.04.2013

[http://books.google.no/books?id=GFZ\\_TIc4q6UC&pg=SL20PA6&lpg=SL20#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.no/books?id=GFZ_TIc4q6UC&pg=SL20PA6&lpg=SL20#v=onepage&q&f=false), accessed 07.04. 2013

<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/search/pro%20bono>, accessed 09.04.2013

<http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/op-ed-editorial/commentary/5573-the-role-of-the-church-in-the-fight-for-justice-and-rights-alloysious-toes-statement-to-the-liberian-council-of-churches.html>, accessed 13.04. 2013

<http://www.ips.org/mdg3/agriculture-liberiaaposs-land-just-for-some/>, accessed 19.04. 2013

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kerygma>, accessed 29.04. 2013

<http://www.wordnik.com/words/diakonia>, accessed 29.04. 2013

<http://www.shol.com/featheredprop/theo3.html>, accessed 21.04. 2013

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/proclamation>, accessed 28.04. 2013

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/bassa.htm>, accessed 29.04. 2013