

# **Churches of Christ among the Watchi of Togo**

## **Church Growth Report for the Year 2000**

### **Including a Rational for 2000 Statistics as well as Recommendations and Projections for Future Growth**

#### **General Statistics**

Churches among the Watchi of Togo who fellowship together and made reports numbered 17 in December 2000. Most are small congregations with memberships of baptized believers averaging about 24 members with some under 10 while one has 100 members.

By initial estimates, three congregations are functioning as independent congregations. This means that outside of occasional visits and advice, the congregation is no longer led by a missionary. Of these three, one is strong and thriving (Vogan), one is stable but at a plateau (Nytaveglo), and one is unstable and weakened due to leadership problems (Tabligbo). Eight congregations are considered maturing congregations. This means that their leadership is not yet capable of leading the congregation without involvement from other congregations and/or missionaries. Of these eight only two were strong in 2000. Nyinoume is rapidly approaching independence. Koleve is stable although growth is at a plateau. These two congregations were also involved in evangelization over the last year. Six of the congregations showed signs of weakness in areas such as loss of members and leadership problems. Ahonkpe has suffered both loss of members and lack of good leadership. VoAsso is old enough to be independent but has had many of the leaders move away. Tsadome has had many leadership problems and a loss of members to another denomination. Fiove, Ahepe and Kpokpo Kondji all had leadership problems over the last year coupled with some membership apathy and various other problems. Of the six new congregations all but one, Klologo, started out with stability. Lord willing, these congregations will continue to grow.

Of the church members, more than 80% are active in their churches. This means that they attend their home church or help in other congregations at least three or four times a month. This indicates that churches are encouraging members to attend regularly. This is also indicated by the growing number of churches that meet at other times during the week for prayer and Bible study. In addition to church attendance many members were involved in preaching points. Four established congregations (Vogan, Tabligbo, Nyinoume, and Koleve) participated in church plantings. Two new churches (Kpetsou and Adakonou Kope) were also already involved in church plantings. This shows a good amount of membership involvement in the churches which needs to be continued.

In the breakdown of men and women in the churches, men compose nearly 60% of the churches while women make up the difference with just over 40%. This is not greatly disproportional; however, new churches often have more young men converts. Churches need to continue targeting whole families and the young women of the communities. In order for the churches to have Christian marriages, the proportion of young men and women needs to be fairly even, however the number of single males is double that of the women (140 single men, 71 single women). Single young women must be targeted for conversion.

One other interesting statistic is the number of married men. With only 75 married men, this is the smallest segment of the church. In evangelism, churches must focus on married men. These men are the heads of their families and leaders in the community. When they are targeted in evangelization, the church is strengthened. In evangelization, the older men of the community should be the first priority. Young men will come to faith even if they are not targeted. Women are more likely to repent if their husbands are members. Therefore, churches should evangelize with a focus on men and family groups.

The age breakdown of the church shows that the largest segment is held by the youth. 60% of the baptized members are under thirty. This comes as no surprise when one realizes that half of the population of Togo is under 16, and 75% of the population is under 30. This group is important to the future of the church; however, they must have good leadership from the older community of the church. Time after time, churches which rely on the youth for teaching and leadership are led into confusion and problems. The strength of the youth is their vitality and energy. They should be included in church outreach and programs of the congregation; however, they should be led by wise and capable mature leaders. The next age group is 30-50 years old. About 33% of the members are in this group. This group is usually the strength of the congregation. They are relied on for leadership and are usually more stable in their faith. As churches begin to look towards elderships, many will come from this group. This is particularly evident when one realizes that the average life expectancy in Togo only reaches into the 50's. The last group is over 50 years old. This group only accounted for about 7% of the membership. This group should not be overlooked. They bring wisdom

although they are often faced with illiteracy and long past lives in pagan worship. Praise God that people are never too old to convert and use their testimonies to influence other older people in the community.

Although baptized membership is only at about 400, the combined attendance reaches nearly 600. This includes a large number of children. This group should not be overlooked. Although they are not baptized members, Lord willing, they will be one day. Children, as already noted, are the largest age group in the Togo population. This group should be targeted for attendance so that they will learn of Jesus in their youth and one day become Christians. If this group is not targeted the future of the church will be much weaker. Children's programs should be implemented in all churches as a valuable part of the church body. Adult visitors are also part of the attendance. This group needs to grow. Members should constantly be inviting friends and family members to worship times. The number of visitors indicates the potential for future members. This should therefore inspire programs of visitor invitation. All churches should be growing, but as will be noted below, few of the established churches experienced continued growth in 2000. This must change and be reflected in the number of visitors present.

One interesting statistic that seems to indicate strength and stability in churches is the number of married couples worshipping together. Of the nine strong and stable congregations, seven have at least two married couples as faithful members, while only two strong congregations had one or no couples. This seems to be confirmed in the fact that of the eight week churches, only one has two or more married couples worshipping together.

Another statistic being looked at is the health of churches in close proximity to others. Clusters of churches which fellowship regularly and cooperate in various aspects of church life are a great encouragement to one another. This can be stimulated when churches are near enough to one another to allow members to easily visit one another in worship, leadership meetings, work projects such as buildings, and outreach. Churches within a 5-7 kilometer radius seem to be natural clusters, although some clusters are spread even farther apart. In December 2000, there were three active clusters (Dagbati-including Tsadome, Nyitaveglovi, VoAsso, and Ahonkpe; Adangbe-including Koleve, Didokpo, and Kpeve; and Kpetsou-including Fiove, Nyitaveglo, and Kpetsou). These churches meet for combined worship regularly and have activities such as women's classes and have leadership meetings for mutual encouragement. The Dogbati cluster has found this structure extremely valuable as the churches have relied on one another through growth problems. One leader said that had it not been for the cooperation of the four churches, it is likely that all four congregations would have ceased to exist. Although there have been attempts to have a Tabligbo cluster, the past independence of Tabligbo and Kpokpo Kondji has seemed to prohibit new interdependence. Ahepe is unfortunately still far from others. Klologo was also without a sister church in December 2000 and seemed to be slipping although Vogan had been very consistent in visits and teaching. Vogan is very active in evangelism and the help of smaller churches, but they are still independent. The Atsansi congregation was planted with the intention of being a cluster in 2001. Evangelism has already begun in one near village and plans are being formed for another. Similarly, Adakonou Kope is already involved in plans and evangelism to form a cluster in their area. For clusters to work well, they must be implemented soon, before a church becomes too independent. The future of cluster cooperation has yet to be seen; however, it shows great potential in stimulating growth, maturation, and membership retention.

## **Membership Gains**

During the year 2000, actual growth in membership and new church plantings occurred at differing rates. The growth of congregations was at 41.67% with 6 new churches planted and the loss of one congregation. The six congregations planted were Didokpo, Kpeve, Kpetsou, Adakonou Kondji, Klologo, and Atsansi. One church, Awouti Kondji, congregation ceased to fellowship with churches of Christ in 2000 after doctrinal and affiliation changes occurred throughout 1999. Membership growth did not reflect the same growth patterns as the growth of congregations. Membership only grew at 15.23%. Even as new congregations were started, established churches experienced growth challenges and losses. Only one established congregation, Kpokpo Kondji, showed actual growth during the year 2000 and that was with only two members. Another congregation which showed actual growth, Nyinoume, sacrificed many of its members as they sent many members to start the church in Kpetsou. This left eight established congregations showing membership losses by the end of the year. These losses will be analyzed below.

Growth occurred through various means over the year. There were 237 new members added in 2000. About half (53%) of the new members came from new church plantings. This indicates that growth of a movement necessitates new church plantings. It also indicates that there is still healthy growth occurring in at least a few established churches although their losses countered many of these gains. Nearly half (47%) of the growth occurred in established congregations. Most of the growth came through baptism of pagans. In addition to baptism, members were added to fellowship through restorations and transference from other churches of Christ and denominations.

- The number of baptisms in 2000 was 172. This high rate of conversion was particularly evidenced in the planting of new churches. Of the 172 baptisms, 57% or 98 occurred where new churches were planted.

However, nine out of the eleven established churches also had baptisms through out the year totaling 74. Two established churches, Vogan and Nyinoume dominated this with 25 baptisms each accounting for 30% of all baptisms and 68% of baptisms among established churches. This shows that established churches should learn from these two congregations the importance of continued growth through evangelism among non-Christians. All congregations should continue to propagate through new births of Christians. This element of growth must continue to be emphasized.

- Another category of growth occurred through restorations. These people had been faithful Christians at one time, but had fallen away from the Lord before the year 2000. During the year they return to faithfulness and recommitted themselves to the Lord. There were 11 people who were restored to the Lord in 2000. This accounted for nearly 5% of the net growth in 2000. If members continue to seek after the lost sheep and bring them back to the Great Shepherd, this can increase. However, if reversion can be diminished, this category of growth will always be low simply because fewer have been lost who need to be restored.
- The third category of growth occurred through transfer. These were members of other churches of Christ or denominations who had already experienced immersion in the Lord and desired to serve the Lord with the local congregation. In this category, 54 people transferred into congregations accounting for 23% of the year's growth. A large group of these, nineteen in all, were found transferring from the Nyinoume congregation to the Kpetsou. This accounted for nearly 35% of the transfers. Transfer growth is not growth from among non-Christians, our primary target. Although all growth is appreciated and the example of multiplication ministries with Nyinoume planting Kpetsou through transfer is wonderful and reproducible, churches must not make this area of growth their primary target. Otherwise we become sheep-stealers and cause problems between churches that other Christian groups and pagans alike cannot understand or appreciate.

As more congregations were started, only one, Adakonou Kope, was started by a missionary without the assistance of established churches. Five were started with the cooperation of missionaries and nationals. There were no churches started by congregations without the assistance of the missionaries. To a great degree, these numbers indicate the planned approach of the missionaries to cooperate with congregations in church planting in order to train them to be well equipped; however, as time goes on, those churches who have cooperated with missionaries previously, should strive to act independently to plant churches.

Also to be noted when studying growth is the low involvement of churches in new church plantings. Only five of the eleven established churches (Vogan, Nyinoume, Tabligbo, and Koleve, Tsadome) participated in church plantings. Of the churches not participating in church plantings, nearly all were dealing with local problems. Their internal struggles limited their outreach. Some believe that inward focused churches cease to grow and also fail to see growth in new church plantings. They would argue that churches focused on church planting and evangelism see internal growth and growth in outside evangelism in addition to natural maturation. Others would reasonably argue that before seeking numerical growth, churches should take care of internal struggles in order to increase spiritual growth. Both views are valid. Churches must continue to be focused on the harvesting of souls. At the same time, churches must continue to strive for maturity and spiritual growth. However, numerical growth and spiritual growth should not be mutually exclusive. Churches must continue to strive for both forms of growth by evangelizing and leading the established churches toward maturity. In this discussion it is commendable that two new churches, Adakonou Kope and Kpetsou, were both involved in evangelism and church plantings. Their example should be noted by evangelist and considered for implementation in young churches soon after planting. The new vitality of the church often yields a harvest. It helps protect the young church from apathetic study focus and actually stimulates maturity as new Christians must defend their faith and grow in conviction.

One area of growth already alluded to but not specifically pointed out is internal growth. Young and established churches must continue to grow. Although statistics are not available to confirm the observation, many of the evangelists and missionaries among the Watchi believe that if a new church does not have a second wave of conversions within the first year, future growth will be very low. This may be true because the young Christians must be the primary spokesmen for Christ in their community. If they do not reach out while their faith is fresh, there is a great likelihood that they will not reach out through evangelism later. Also, it should be noted that established churches are going to experience membership loss to moves, reversion and transfers as a normal part of church life. Therefore it must also be realized that losses must be offset and even surpassed through the conversion of new souls as a normal part of church life. For church growth to occur among the Watchi of Togo, our established churches must not simply participate in new church plantings. They must also continue to stimulate evangelism in their own congregations so as to win the lost and promote healthy increases in membership. Evangelization at home and in new areas should never be in opposition. Rather, both are necessary for the advancement of the Kingdom and the

health of the churches. Growth plateaus are realities, but our congregations must never be comfortable with growth stagnation and should continually strive for new growth.

## Membership Losses

While loss of members is never desirable, it is normal. However, there are some patterns that should be noted in order to stop membership attrition. Four primary factors should be investigated: loss to other churches of Christ, loss to other denominations, loss due to members moving away, and loss as members return to the world. The fifth aspect of loss, death, did not account for even one percent of the churches' losses and therefore will not be discussed.

- Membership transferring between churches is not considered true loss, rather it is transferred. Of the 36 members who transferred to other churches of Christ, most occurred through the movement of Nyinoume members to the new congregation in Kpetsou. Another reason for movement of members between churches was urbanization. Students moved from villages to cities for school. People of the villages moved to the cities for work. However, loss due to transfers to other churches of Christ only accounted for about 20% of the losses reported. The other areas of membership loss need to be inspected more fully so that adequate plans can be made to alleviate these problems in the future. At this time there is not much of a problem of members casually switching between congregations. However, this needs to be watched as clusters of churches grow in close proximity to one another.
- Another cause of loss is membership moving to other denominations. About 20% of the membership losses in 2000 occurred when members left for other denominations. Additional steps may be warranted to determine what is happening in the churches to cause members to move to other denominations. If it is determined that it is due to problems such as sin or leadership weaknesses, these problems should be addressed in order to curb the problem and even encourage members to return. If the losses to other denominations occur because of doctrinal disputes, these doctrines should be investigated and studied. If changes are scripturally necessary, they should be made. Otherwise studied conclusions should be explained to members to avoid future attrition.
- The third area of membership loss was due to members moving away. This also accounted for about 20% of the losses. Some of this happened because of marriage. Another reason people moved was for job opportunities. This problem was particularly evident in the Dagbati cluster. As the Phosphate mines are acquiring land in the area, many people are moving to the cities such as Accra, Lagos, Lome, and Abidjan for job training and work. In addition to this, areas such as Dagbati and others have no land left for farming because of the generations of land division among children and the purchase of land by outsiders and mining operations. This leaves some with little choice but to move to the cities for employment or to large farm operations in distant areas. This is occasionally permanent but a larger problem which may not be evident in the statistics is that some men leave their families for months at a time for as farm-hands and charcoal producers. In addition, some students move away to attend school and never find another church home. They often return home during the breaks with weak faith. Churches must begin to encourage students who leave home to practice their faith and be active in their home congregations during the breaks. Additionally churches must begin to strategize with members who move away so that this can be an opportunity for new church plantings. When a member moves, he should at least be open to the possibility of beginning a new church in the new area.
- The fourth area to be identified is loss to the world. This area of loss was catastrophic to the health of the churches and accounted for nearly 40% of the year's losses. Those who fall into this category left the Lord and returned to the world. They did not go to other congregations of churches of Christ or to other denominations; they simply fell away. This is an area of loss that the churches must grow sensitive to. Churches must guard against members who become lazy, discouraged, disenchanted with church policies and structure, etc... Many of the churches lost more members to the Devil than the gained for the Lord in 2000. The churches must make plans to counteract this trend. First, we need to strive for true conversion and not simple "club-like" affiliation among members. We must emphasize counting the cost before becoming a Christian-not in order to dissuade people from becoming Christians, but to emphasize the life-long commitment it entails. After this, churches must be sensitive to members who are backsliding and encourage them before they return to the world. Churches must be sensitive to the spiritual needs of the members in order to help them grow in faith and fellowship. Visitation groups, encouragement structures, or other preventive measures should seriously be considered in congregations. The evangelist planting churches should encourage members to pay careful attention to weaker members from the inception of the church. The evangelist must model this and help the local members to initiate such activities.

Related to the loss of members was the loss of many leaders in a few of the churches. As leaders of some of the churches, particularly the Dogbati area, left for employment and job training, their churches were left paralyzed. Although it is true that a man must feed his family, it is equally true that the church must be spiritually fed. Although

lay leaders are not paid, they must consider the health of their congregations before leaving. Churches may need to think of ways to help those who serve the congregations. Since most of the members are subsistence farmers, this may include offerings of maize and other farm goods. At the same time, leaders need to be encouraged to test God and walk by faith in the realization that God will take care of their families.

### **Conclusion:**

In view of the church growth studies from 2000, it is apparent that the churches of Christ among the Watchi are growing in numbers and maturity. At the same time it is evident that churches can improve their growth by following some of the proceeding ideas for target groups and evangelization. Retention of membership must also become a focus so that churches see actual growth. Goals for 2001 should include internal growth, new preaching points, and membership retention.

If current rates of growth are continued, by the end of 2001 there should be 462 members and 24 congregations. This would call for 61 new Christians and 7 additional congregations. It must be remembered however that the growth of the Kingdom of God is a spiritual affair and not simply a statistical analysis as is performed in economics and business.

In light of the spiritual nature of church growth, the church must learn to move forward in the Spirit. Spiritually, churches must be prepared to step out in faith through prayer. The Watchi are still highly pagan and largely unresponsive to the gospel. Less than 2% of the Watchi are currently active Christians of any affiliation. Unless The Church of Jesus boldly moves into spiritual conquest, Satan will continue to dominate the Watchi. Our congregations must begin fasting, praying, and participating in order for the harvest to be made among the Watchi. Spiritual preparation should be made before stepping out to attack the stronghold of Satan. Churches casually pursuing evangelism without adequate dependence on God will be easy prey for Satan, who seeks to devour Christians like a roaring lion. As the church moves forward, may God stretch out his had before his people and prepare the Watchi for a harvest of righteousness.