

Evangelists: Unseen And Unheard

[This was written four years ago while I met with the Westside church in Beaverton, Oregon. The statistical numbers have grown much in these four years.]

She is an evangelist with the gospel message ringing in her heart, but her voice is not heard ringing from our pulpit. Her constant concern is the eternal welfare of others, but she knows not to ask permission to share that concern with a classroom filled with men in the place of assembly. If her living room were filled each week with men eagerly listening to her proclaim the good news of life in Christ, no doubt, many fellow-disciples would be uncomfortable with it, maybe subjecting her to questions and, perhaps, censure. As an evangelist she is both unseen and unheard.

If, however, all of the persons she has led to Christ through proclamation of the gospel were to assemble with her as a group, that group would be larger than the one with which most of you assemble. She has kept no list of the persons she has helped to convert, nor has she immersed any of them herself, but such a record would dwarf the list of persons I have baptized as a career preacher.

The name of this evangelist is Margaret MacCorkell, a fellow-servant in our congregation. But this is not just about her and our congregation. It is about hundreds, or thousands, of other women in churches across our land who have led in the greatest, most effective evangelistic, or “missionary” activity since WWII within Churches of Christ. My purpose is to recognize and honor Margaret and that multitude of unseen and unheard evangelists and to encourage others to join that force in private ministry.

Margaret graduated from Abilene Christian College in 1952. Though her interest in missions was stirred, she never went into foreign fields. Along in this period of time, the beloved Jimmie Lovell began his little publication with his motto, something like, “Every person has the right to hear the gospel once more than any person has a right to hear it twice.” His lifelong theme was about taking the gospel to other peoples. He began encouraging the use of correspondence courses among the many nations where English is a second language. This developed into World Bible School in 1974. WBS is actually no organization overseeing a work. It is a cooperative effort in providing materials which teachers have the option of using. WBS helps by providing information and advice. It aids both women and men in evangelizing in private ministries. From desks, dining room tables, and kitchen bars across America, hundreds of unseen and unheard teachers have converted many thousands in other lands. And, yes, most of the converts of these women have been men.

Margaret MacCorkell became involved in WBS thirteen years ago. She has kept no records and has been reluctant to estimate figures that I inquired about. She has involved others at times and has received help with expenses at times from individuals and her congregation. She supposes she has sent lessons to 20,000 persons, mostly in Africa. For various reasons, most do not return the first lesson. Perhaps the main reason is that, due to poverty, the student simply does not have money for the postage. But even that one comprehensive lesson is read! And shared.

I could claim all the credit for converting very few of the persons that I have immersed for, in most cases, I was actually working in concert with other individuals or the whole congregation. Credit for conversions through correspondence courses, however, can be more defined even though final contact and baptism must be done by others on the field.

Africa has been the target of most correspondence teaching. Today, there are follow-up personnel in various countries to contact students who have completed their courses. Many capable native preachers have been trained there enabling the church to become indigenous. The African church has matured. How successfully? There may be more Churches of Christ in Africa now than in America! The African church now numbers 14,676 congregations, up from 13,000 in 2000, averaging eight new congregations per week! The rolls of those churches total 1,014,021, according to a bulletin from Richland Hills Church of Christ. A church directory, "Churches of Christ in the United States," 2000 edition, lists 1,264,152 in the US and its territories. (At their rapid rate of growth in the last four years, they probably outnumber us now.)

It is a vigorous, spirited movement in Africa. In America we are a rapidly graying church. A great part of their growth is due to the dedicated and patient work of unseen and unheard evangelists, a larger part of them being women. Their names are not lauded nor is their work applauded generally in our congregations and publications. But God knows them and has used them in significantly changing a continent.

Please know that I am not downplaying the dedicated and selfless work of the many persons who have given of themselves tirelessly on the continent of Africa. And I recognize and applaud the maturing of native leadership and evangelists. These fourth generation leaders will continue to allow us to rejoice that "Darkest Africa" is now "Brightest Africa."

Margaret has just returned from "Jabulani Africa," a workshop celebrating 100 years of evangelism in Africa. It was a highlight of her life. "Jabulani" is a Zulu word meaning "rejoice." With help from other congregations, this conference and workshop was at the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas. About 25 leaders among the African churches were the speakers and about twice that many more from Africa attended. An estimated 5,000 Africans, missionaries, WBS teachers, elders, and other concerned persons gathered in a climaxing assembly in a stadium in Fort Worth.

Margaret was deeply impressed by the African speakers. They were well-educated, highly intelligent, men of dignity, and fully mature in spiritual concepts. There were group meetings for exchange of ideas about how to proceed most effectively. I will include below some points Margaret learned from these men and jotted down for me.

<> There is need for literature, especially for women and children. They need material on marriage relationships, rearing of children, and the woman's work in the church. Material for children is almost non-existent. The men need teaching in these areas so they can teach it to the churches.

<> Each WBS student is promised a free Bible upon completion of their five-part course. She recommends the Easy-To-Read Bible, which employs only 500 different words. The

simple translation is especially helpful because English is a second language there and must be translated simply. In follow-up work it is useful for students to be given a Bible dictionary, concordance, and other elementary helps.

◇ Financial help is needed for travel of WBS follow-up workers there and for postage for students in WBS. (Their extreme poverty and lack of mastery of English is no indication of lack of desire or ability to learn. A condescending attitude on our part is counter-productive.)

◇ Medical teams are welcomed to work under the supervision of our hospitals there.

◇ Short-term stays are not encouraged for they can be more problem than good. So little can be done effectively in a strange culture in a short time, and then it is left behind. This does not exclude pre-arranged missions to bring supplies like medicines or to complete a specific project.

◇ All speakers emphasized the urgency of evangelizing Africa and grounding the brethren because the Muslims are using our oil money to convert Africa and to promote “death to all Christians.”

You, like Margaret MacCorkell and many other women, men, and teenagers can have a rewarding private ministry of evangelism without being seen or heard. You can use the time, money, and talent God has given you to reach across the continents, even with a choice of the nation or race for your outreach. You need not ask the permission or depend upon the supervision of others, though assistance is always available. You can teach as many students as you wish, follow your own schedule, and use WBS lessons or prepare your own. Your money is not invested in church real estate, airline tickets, or salaries for workers. You can work alone or with others. You can check and grade lessons without a higher education. Timidity and lack of confidence should not deter your effectiveness. You will need love for souls which inspires diligent work and patience. Also, you must believe that the gospel, not the messenger, is the power of God unto salvation. Being an unheard and unseen evangelist, you need no speech skills and you don't have to dress for the job. So, is this your “call to preach”?

Hungry souls await your decision. What a joy it will be in the next world to meet those whom you introduced to Christ. “Jabulani” Eternally!

You may enroll as a student or as a teacher by writing World Bible School, P.O. Box 2100, Cedar Park, TX 78630, by calling 512-345-8190, or by email to <wbschool.net >.

You can check out “Jabulani Africa” and other information at <www.jabulaniafrica.org >, <www.wbschool.org >, and <www.wbschool.net >.

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