

## APTEA – Serving Pentecostal Bible Training Programs across Africa

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### Abstract

The Association for Pentecostal Theological Education in Africa (APTEA) is a full-service educational organization serving Pentecostal training institutions and individuals on the African continent in the pursuit of excellence. Its three commissions focus on accreditation, faculty certification, and scholarly writing. The strength of the organization is its triennial conferences where the Bible school leaders are challenged to pursue excellence as they equip the next generation to lead and serve the Church of Africa in fulfilling the Great Commission. From its inception in 2011, APTEA has been a member of WAPTE. The association has a rich heritage, dating back to the late 1980s, and continues to actively impact training programs in many of Africa's nations.

**Key Words:** Decade of Harvest, Africa Theological Training Services, Commission for Theological Education, *missio Dei*.

### Beginning out of the Decade of Harvest

The conceptual spark and precursor for the Association for Pentecostal Theological Education in Africa (APTEA) began in 1989 with two men, Rev. Don Corbin and Dr. John V. York. Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM),<sup>1</sup> working collaboratively with national churches around the world, stood at the brink of launching the “Decade of Harvest” (DOH) which was a concerted effort of the global fraternity of Assemblies of God churches, in the last decade of the second millennium, to see people of every nation evangelized and discipled, accompanied by aggressive church planting. The AG Church dedicated itself to work and pray “until we witness the evangelization of the entire world.”<sup>2</sup>

Leading and coordinating the efforts in Africa was Africa Regional Director, Don Corbin, with his team of missionaries serving in Africa. Corbin worked diligently to partner with and

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<sup>1</sup> The global mission outreach of the Assemblies of God (USA) adopted the name Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) in 2001. Previously it was called the Division of Foreign Missions (DFM).

<sup>2</sup> Joe Hewes, “History of World Missions in the Assemblies of God,” 4, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://pastorjohewes.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/missions-week-5.pdf>.

mobilize the leaders of national churches from 26 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of the decade, the number of AG adherents globally nearly doubled.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the evangelistic effort in 1989, the Assemblies of God worldwide numbered 128,307 churches with 18.5 million adherents. At the end of 1999, there were 212,522 churches and 34.6 million adherents.

According to Jerry S. Jester,<sup>4</sup> the growth of the African church was unprecedented. From 1989 to 1999, the number of churches grew from 11,700 to 24,800. Church ministers increased from 9,827 to 24,881. The number of Bible schools multiplied from 53 to 205. Enrollment in those schools expanded from 4,055 to 13,109. Adherents burgeoned from 2.1 million to 8.8 million people.

Corbin was keen on enhancing the mission's partnership with national church leaders to one of a "relational fraternity," which he labelled "the friendship bond."<sup>5</sup> The collegiality and trust developed between the mission and national churches, along with a deep reliance on the leading of the Holy Spirit, resulted in this unparalleled growth. He implemented a two-pronged strategy for church expansion and sustainability: 1) plant strong and healthy local churches; and 2) train men and women from indigenous national churches to lead the new church plants.<sup>6</sup>

The second key player who took the lead in the training component for the DOH in Africa was John V. York. York and his family began their missions service in Nigeria in 1972 where he taught and directed Bible schools until 1989. When a new initiative of AGWM/Africa,

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<sup>3</sup> AG General Secretary's Office, Statistics: "AG Worldwide Churches and Adherents, 1987-2015," June 1, 2016, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://ag.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry S. Jester, "Empowered Belonging through Identity Transformation: Assemblies of God Church Planting Narratives from West Africa since 1990" (PhD diss., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2014), 66, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/4fedbfc3ab856e36e85d63bb41a029d2/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>.

<sup>5</sup> Jester, "Assemblies of God Church Planting Narratives," 57.

<sup>6</sup> Jester, "Assemblies of God Church Planting Narratives," 60.

Africa Theological Training Service (ATTS), was founded in 1989, York was appointed to lead the training effort. He moved to Malawi and then Togo establishing regional offices for ATTS. York constantly emphasized the need for the theological training of African pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and educators, and at the heart of their preparation was the cultivation of a commitment to the mission of God (*missio Dei*). “The Lord wills that the Bible schools of Africa shake the world.”<sup>7</sup> Every individual, local church, and national church was responsible to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to participate in fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission of “discipling the nations” (Matt. 28:19-20). For York, the Bible schools that already existed needed to pursue excellence in all aspects of their training operations to ensure that graduates would be grounded in Scripture, filled with the Holy Spirit, committed to God’s global mission, and serve as faithful shepherds of God’s flock, the local church. York moved to the States in 1997 due to declining health but continued directing the ministries of ATTS.

If scores of new churches were to be planted, multitudes of new men and women needed to be trained to pastor these communities and conserve the spiritual harvest. This required the establishment of new Bible schools and extension programs, and the accessibility of training for all called to ministerial leadership. Efforts for launching new Bible schools that would perform at a high level of effectiveness would demand the participation of the entire mission working in full collaboration with national church leadership. The underlining presupposition of Corbin and York was that Bible schools needed to maintain symbiotic relationships with their national churches. Schools relied on the support of their national churches and were accountable to the church for their performance and productivity. Church leaders needed to cultivate valued

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. John V. York to Dr. Norman D. Anderson, April 23, 1997, personal letter.

relationships with graduates so that upon finishing their studies, they would be assigned a place of ministry.

With the rapid growth of churches and schools during the DOH, it quickly became apparent that a mechanism was needed to assess the operational systems of schools and evaluate the ministry effectiveness of graduates as the outcomes of Bible school training process. To meaningful assess training, a recognized standard of excellence had to be determined, then schools needed to be encouraged to work to measure up to these thresholds. Initially efforts were made to associate with Evangelical accrediting bodies operating on the continent, but these advances were met with resistance due to the strong and uncompromising commitment of AG schools to train their students in biblical and Pentecostal beliefs and practices. The Africa Office and ATTS (Corbin and York) called for the formation of the Commission for Theological Education (CTE) in 1992, and the body was formally recognized in 1995. York called on missionary educators in Africa, such as Dr. Marvin Gilbert, Rev. G.L. Haggard, and Dr. Norman D. Anderson, to develop a set of standards by which schools could be evaluated. Along with an assessment tool, a procedure was developed for schools to engage in the appraisal process. While York led the training and development efforts of ATTS and CTE, he emphasized that these organizations needed to provide the structure, encouragement, support, and validation for Bible schools and function to assist schools in reaching their full potential as Pentecostal training institutions.

Ten standards were established against which schools would first examine themselves through a rigorous self-study.<sup>8</sup> The first and most important standard required the articulation of

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<sup>8</sup> The ten standards include a concise mission's statement, goals, and objectives; educational programs; faculty and staff; student development; learning resources; governance and administration; physical resources; financial resources, and student outcomes. Explanations and objective indicators of each standard are detailed in the *Bible School Leadership Manual*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by John Easter and Carl Gibbs (Springfield, MO: Africa's Hope, 2021).

a clear and concise statement of mission and purpose. From there, the school conducted a self-assessment to measure its compliance with the remaining nine standards. Once drafted, the report was submitted to CTE, followed by the visit of an international team consisting of national church and mission's personnel to confirm the self-study report and offer recommendations on ways to improve the institution's effectiveness.

The first Bible school on the continent to be endorsed was Instituto Bíblico de Angola das Assembléias de Deus, whose director was Rev. José Carlos, in 1997. The visiting team consisted of Jean Bandé (Burkina Faso), Bill Johnston (Swaziland), and Norman Anderson (USA). York gave them these instructions: "Each of the ten standards should be meticulously applied to the self-study, strengths and weaknesses noted, and a clear plan of action understood and committed to by all."<sup>9</sup> The self-study report and the team's onsite evaluation were sent to the chairman of CTE who continued to communicate with and monitor the progress of the school as it addressed deficiencies in reaching the standards. When all the standards were met, or the institution presented a clear plan on how each weakness was being addressed, endorsement was awarded the school for a 5-year period.<sup>10</sup> Endorsement was an ecclesiastical award acknowledging that a school was operating effectively, efficiently, and spiritually in fulfilling its mission. Endorsement was presented by both ATTS/CTE and the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (AAGA), an alliance of all national Assemblies of God Churches in Africa. Involving AAGA in the award served to keep the AG indigenous churches alert to the critical nature of training, to stay aware of the progress their schools were making across the continent in achieving excellence in their

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<sup>9</sup> York to Anderson, April 23, 1997, letter.

<sup>10</sup> If there were noted deficiencies, the endorsement was limited to 3 years with additional site visits to insure conformity to the standards.

training programs, and to bond together national churches and Bible schools from across the continent for a greater purpose – the fulfillment of the Great Commission.<sup>11</sup>

From CTE minutes throughout the 1990s, it appears that Corbin sat in on many of the CTE committee meetings to keep abreast of the progress of Bible schools seeking endorsement. He mobilized his entire African missionary team, including area representatives, team leaders overseeing individual countries, and local missionary personnel, to encourage every Bible school on the continent to pursue endorsement with the CTE. The schools engaged in the process were to be visited by AGWM workers to inspire school leaders to achieve their goal. To further encouragement the quest for endorsement, Corbin enlisted the participation of other ministry arms of AGWM who could provide learning resources, especially library books, for those schools which achieved endorsement. A key contributor of books for Bible school libraries was Rev. Jerry Flokstra and his ministry, “Africa Library Services Office” (ALSO).<sup>12</sup> Throughout the DOH, Flokstra used the funds provided by the Africa office to purchase books at discounted prices multiplying the library resources for endorsed schools.

### **The Years from 2000-2011**

Moving into the new millennium, other mission organizations and their affiliated national churches noted the quality work of ATTS and CTE and inquired about developing and formalizing inter-missional and interdenominational agreements with this endorsing body. One such mission was the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) and their fraternal churches in Africa. As of 2001, the PAOC operated 13 institutions across Africa providing ministerial training for 5000 students. Led by Dr. Irving Whitt and Dr. Kirk Kauffeldt, the PAOC’s

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<sup>11</sup> York to Anderson, April 23, 1997, letter.

<sup>12</sup> Under the leadership of Flokstra’s son, Gary, and his wife, Glenna, ALSO has morphed into “4 The World Resource Distributors” and continues to be a strong supporter of training in Africa. See <https://4wrld.org/>.

educational initiative in Africa, the Theological Education and Leadership Training Advisory Council (TELTAC), requested to have their schools included in the CTE endorsement process for the purpose of achieving a recognized level of standardization and professionalism.

By early 2002, CTE developed an *Endorsement Resource Manual* and worked to refine the composition of its visiting teams. The number of residential training programs had grown to 73 AG and 14 PAOC campuses. With the expectation that every school would pursue endorsement, the concern of the CTE chairman, Rev. Jerry Spain (missionary educator having served in Tanzania and Kenya, at this time resident in the States), and the other committee members, Bill Kirsch (South Africa), Jean Pawentaore (Burkina Faso), John Ikoni (Nigeria), and John York (USA), was how they would have the time and finance to visit all the schools. Their plan was to recruit educators from the PAOC to provide additional personnel for the envisioned site visits.<sup>13</sup>

Schools pursuing endorsement slowed below expectations during the decade of 2000-2010. In 2006, CTE reported that they had endorsed 25 schools. By 2010, the number had increased to 29. There were several significant events that may have affected the expected trajectory of schools seeking endorsement. A new Regional Director, Rev. Mike McClafin, replaced Don Corbin in 2003 and led AGWM's ministry in Africa until 2014. Like his predecessor, McClafin noted the importance of training for the church in Africa, "Because of the tremendous church growth, we have an enormous need to train pastors and other leaders."<sup>14</sup> In 2004, a new facility was constructed in Springfield, Missouri, to house ATTS and the CTE. To

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<sup>13</sup> CTE Minutes, Honeydew, South Africa, January 12, 2002. It should be noted that the minutes referred to 73 AG resident Bible Colleges. Comparing this number with the statistics provided in Jester's dissertation, the discrepancy could be explained by considering the existence of 132 extension programs scattered across the continent which were not targeted for endorsement at this time.

<sup>14</sup> Paulina C. "Regional Director Appointed," *The Christian Post*, January 1, 2003, accessed August 14, 2024, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/regional-director-appointed.html>.

bring clarity for the AG American church regarding the mission of ATTS, the name “Africa’s Hope” was adopted and used for communication with American churches while the ministry continued to be known as ATTS in Africa. The mission statement of Africa’s Hope stated: “We exist to facilitate training that equips the church in Africa to disciple the nations in the power of the Holy Spirit. Spirit-empowered, biblically trained leaders are the hope of Africa.”<sup>15</sup> Dr. York passed away in 2005 after an extended battle with cancer. One of York’s final victories was the successful launch of Pan-Africa Theological Seminary in Lomé, Togo, in 2005, a doctoral program serving the national churches of the continent. With his death, McClafin assumed the role of executive director for ATTS from 2005 to 2007. In 2007, Dr. Bill Kirsch was appointed director of ATTS and led the ministry until 2012. Kirsch first served as York’s administrator at ATTS beginning in 2000 before taking this new role. Dr. Carl Gibbs, former missionary to Brazil and academic dean of graduate studies at Global University (USA), transferred to Africa’s Hope and was appointed chairman of the CTE in 2006. Gibbs worked to strengthen the endorsement process, include interdenominational evaluation, and guarantee that the association was providing quality assurance in the performance of its member schools.

Meanwhile there were calls from across the continent for a full-service association that could provide endorsement and accreditation for schools, offer teacher training and certification for Bible college faculty, and promote scholarly research and writing by African Pentecostal scholars addressing critical, theological issues for the church and academy. At the 2008 ATTS continental meeting in Togo, Africa’s Hope invited Dr. John Carter, missionary educator from the Philippines, to advise the delegation on the structure and function of this type of association. A steering committee was formed by CTE to investigate the need for a Pan-African Pentecostal

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<sup>15</sup> “Africa’s Hope,” accessed August 14, 2024, <https://www.africashope.org/>.



Theological association.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, three meetings were convened in Togo, Kenya, and South Africa to gather feedback on the purpose for the association and promote buy-in from missionaries and national church leaders representing several Pentecostal denominations and missions. When the idea of the association was presented to AAGA in 2009, it was enthusiastically approved. Throughout 2010, the steering committee developed essential accreditation tools, a tentative constitution and bylaws for this type of full-service organization, and an agenda for a meeting of Bible school and mission representatives that could officially launch an association to address the needs of Pentecostal training across Africa. A key individual who spent hours drafting the constitution and building a list of potential members was Rev. Joy York, John York's wife.<sup>17</sup> The meeting was called in February 2011.

### **APTEA's Launch in 2011**

At the gathering in Limuru, Kenya, 74 interdenominational and international missions and national church leaders representing 41 institutions and organizations from 20 countries, officially set in order the Association for Pentecostal Theological Education in Africa (APTEA), a theological educational association serving Pentecostal schools and denominations located on the African continent.<sup>18</sup> Dr. John L. Easter was elected as the first executive director of the association. A constitution and bylaws were adopted, officers were selected, and three commissions were appointed, which were: 1) Endorsement and Accreditation; 2) Faculty Enrichment and Certification; and 3) Scholarly Research and Writing. Those selected to make up the Board of Directors consisted of three representative groups: *Denominational Representatives:*

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<sup>16</sup> The key individuals serving on the steering committee were Gibbs, Carter, Easter, and Joy York.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. Joy York remained very engaged at Africa's Hope and PATHS until her retirement in 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Sixty-one people from 24 nations made up the initial invitation list for the first APTEA Triennial Conference in Limuru, February 2011. The statistics for the conference were recorded by Rev. Joy York in the "APTEA First Triennial Conference, Brackenhurst Conference Centre, Limuru, Kenya, 20-23 February 2011, MINUTES."

Lazarus Chakwera – Africa Assemblies of God Alliance, and first chairman of the Board; Vincent Atterbury – Apostolic Faith Mission; and Simon-Peter Emiau – Pentecostal Assemblies of Africa. *Regional Representatives* were: North Africa: Jeremy Feller; West Africa: Jean Bandé; Central Africa: John Ikoni; East Africa: Barnabas Mtokambali; and South Africa: Adrian Chalwe. The *Members at Large* were Peter Njiri, Greg Beggs, Irving Whitt, and Harrison Sakala. The chairs of the three commissions were Robert Shipley, Endorsement and Accreditation Commission;<sup>19</sup> Enson Lwesya, Scholarly Research and Writing Commission; and Murriell McCulley, Faculty Enrichment and Certification Commission.

The mission statement of the association stated that its purpose was “to promote the mission of God by facilitating and ensuring excellence in member institutions through recognition of academic programs, faculty development, institutional enrichment, and scholarly writing.”<sup>20</sup> Mike McClafin, speaking on the important function of APTEA, commented, “Churches are being planted at an unprecedented rate. No need is more critical in Africa right now than training pastors to conserve this incredible harvest that is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> The twenty-nine schools that had earned their endorsement through CTE were grandfathered into APTEA as endorsed institutions.

Easter served in the role of executive director until 2020 when Dr. Doug Lowenberg, missionary to Ethiopia, was chosen. In addition to his responsibilities with APTEA, Easter became co-director for Africa’s Hope in 2012, sharing the leadership responsibilities with Kirsch and Rev. Kirk Spain. In 2013, Easter was appointed by McClafin as the sole director of Africa’s Hope. With a vast array of personnel working at AH, strong financial support, and abundant

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<sup>19</sup> Dr. Jeff Nelson replaced Dr. Shipley in 2012 as the chair of the Endorsement and Accreditation Commission.

<sup>20</sup> APTEA Constitution and Bylaws, 2011, 5.

<sup>21</sup> AG News, “APTEA News Release,” February 24, 2011.

resources, Easter inspired and marshalled Africa's Hope to give direction and support to APTEA along with AH's many ministry engagements to bolster Bible school training across Africa. Triennial conferences were convened in 2014,<sup>22</sup> 2017,<sup>23</sup> and 2020<sup>24</sup> when Lowenberg began his tenure. The fifth triennial conference convened in 2023.

While APTEA was emerging, there was momentum to organize a global Pentecostal educational association, with support coming from African missionary educators and national church leaders along with Pentecostal trainers from around the world, to provide oversight and validation of continental accrediting associations. In July of 2009, Africa's Hope hosted a meeting to launch a global association to provide a standardized and unifying covering for regional accrediting associations. The result was the formation of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education (WAPTE) in 2010.<sup>25</sup> At the Pentecostal World Fellowship Assembly in Stockholm in 2010, Dr. Jack Hayford called for WAPTE to be named the official educational arm of the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF).<sup>26</sup> At this PWF assembly, thirteen educational organizations were recognized as founding members of WAPTE including APTEA, contingent of its formal launch and based on the effectiveness of its parent organization, CTE, operating since 1992. At the invitation of WAPTE, when APTEA was officially established, the association immediately become a member organization of WAPTE serving the Pentecostal, Theological, educational, constituency of the geographical region of Africa.

### **APTEA Today**

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<sup>22</sup> Two Bible schools were awarded endorsement at the 2014 Triennial Conference. By 2014, the APTEA Endorsement Standards had been translated into French and Portuguese.

<sup>23</sup> Approximately 83 delegates attended the 2017 Triennial in Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>24</sup> For the Fourth Triennial Conference in 2020, days prior to the coronavirus global epidemic, 130 delegates gathered in Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>25</sup> Ken Horn, "Pentecostals Convene for Triennial Conference," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 28, 2010, 24-25; and AG News, "Pentecostal Theological Alliance Established," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 27, 2010, 25.

<sup>26</sup> "Pentecostal Theological Alliance Established," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 6, 2010, 27.

The 2023 Triennial Conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates numbering 143 attended the gathering from 32 countries. Dr. Andrew Mkwaila was appointed as chairman of the board. Dr. Emmanuel Amofo became the chair of the Scholarly Research and Writing Commission; and Rev. Gloria Biffert was selected as chair for Faculty Enrichment and Certification.<sup>27</sup> During the 3-day event, plenary sessions and workshops were offered on the theme, “Regeneration for Enhanced Fruitfulness (John 15:16).” Time was set aside for discussion groups, fellowship, and concert prayer. Teaching certificates were awarded. Strong enthusiasm was expressed by delegates to pursue a self-study for their training institutions. Resources were distributed. And a half-day academic symposium allowed for papers to be presented by African scholars.

At the 2024 Annual APTEA board meeting, convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Dr. James Kesanta was appointed chair for the Endorsement and Accreditation Commission. However, in the meeting, the board decided to eliminate the endorsement category and only offer accreditation. Benchmarks for achieving this status are being determined based on the academic training level of a school—whether the program is at the diploma, advanced diploma, bachelors, masters, or doctoral level. The board began discussions on clarifying the job assignments of the 5 regional representatives. Further deliberations took place on how to best evaluate the performance of informal and non-formal training programs, both those that are residential and web-based. And rather than having various levels of association membership, it was decided that

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<sup>27</sup> The full 2023 APTEA Board consists of the following: Chairman, Dr. Andrew Mkwaila; Executive Director, Dr. Douglas Lowenberg; Secretary, Dr. Jeremy Feller; Treasurer, Dr. Murriell McCulley; Denominational Representatives, Dr. Désiré Gnanchou (AOG), Dr. Simon-Peter Emiau (PAG), Dr. Victor Herbst (AFM), Dr. Kirk Kauffeldt (PAOC); Regional Representatives, North Africa, Rev. Ermisha Beyene; Central Africa, Dr. Cécile Bomboko; West Africa, Dr. Jacques Compaore; East Africa Rev. John Tuu; Southern Africa, Rev. Helio Suma; Members at Large, Rev. Randy Tarr (Director, Africa’s Hope); Dr. Carl Gibbs (ATTS); Honoree Member, Dr. John Easter.

any school that meets the criteria standards for membership, may join and be listed on the APTEA web site. Two lists on the site will distinguish those schools that have been accredited and those that are simply members. The date of the awarding of accreditation and the time of expiration will be identified.

APTEA continues to focus on the work of its three commissions and hosting the triennial conferences. Currently, there are 102 schools and 155 individuals who are members of the association. Since its inception first as the CTE and now as APTEA, 41 schools have been endorsed and 3 accredited.<sup>28</sup> The commissions serve schools being endorsed, faculty receiving training leading to certification, and scholarly writing being promoted through symposiums and the publication of the association's electronic journal, *PneumAfrica Journal*. The commission chairs<sup>29</sup> are working diligently to see enhanced participation from member schools with each of the three initiatives. When a school informs the association that they want to begin a self-study for the purpose of accreditation, the chair the Accreditation Commission walks them through the steps and continues to encourage them throughout the process. Three levels of teacher certification can be obtained based on the training and performance of faculty members. The chair of the Commission for Faculty Enrichment and Certification is actively offering training both in person, online, and with videos to empower teachers to be more learning- and outcomes-oriented. The chair for Scholarly Research and Writing offers workshops to schools and regions where there is a request for guidance in developing scholarly research methodologies and in academic writing. Under his leadership, the *PneumAfrica Journal* is published twice annually. African scholars are encouraged to write peer reviewed articles addressing a wide variety of

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<sup>28</sup> The schools accredited are West Africa Advanced School of Theology, Lomé, Togo; Pan-Africa Theological Seminary, Lomé, Togo; and Pan Africa Christian College, Harare, Zimbabwe.

<sup>29</sup> The current chairs are Dr. James Kesanta, Accreditation Commission; Rev. Gloria Biffert, Faculty Enrichment and Certification; and Dr. Emmanuel Amofo, Scholarly Research and Writing.

topics which are included in the journal. Contacts have been made with several book publishers interested in exposing African scholarship to the world.

The Triennial Conferences have been the heartbeat of the association. The emphasis at each gathering remains the pursuit of excellence and quality assurance in the operation of every school, the maintaining of orthodox Pentecostalism in doctrine and practice, upholding a missional focus on the completion of the Great Commission, prioritizing biblical knowledge and scholarship, preserving close relationships between schools and national churches, and the producing of servant practitioners committed to the growth of the local church and its relevance in the society. APTEA attempts to locate the conferences across the continent to encourage maximum participation. While East and South Africa have provided venues easily accessible for membership, the next conference is targeted for West Africa. At the conferences, along with training, inspiration, prayer, and resource distribution, members are encouraged to develop partnerships, collegiality, and collaboration with one another.

### **Challenges**

There are several challenges facing APTEA. Current statistics for the Assemblies of God report that there is some level of ministry activity in 48 of the 54 countries in Africa. Several of these countries have no missionaries and only a nascent national church, but Bible school training is needed. There are 95,000 churches, 73,000 ministers, and 23 million believers. Across the continent, 380 schools are training 25,000 students.<sup>30</sup> One of APTEA's member denominations, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, report 14 partnering Bible training programs.<sup>31</sup> Another member, the Apostolic Faith Mission, has 4 schools in South Africa.<sup>32</sup> Many

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<sup>30</sup> These statistics are limited to information gathered from "Africa's Hope," accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.africashope.org/>; and "AGWM Africa," accessed August 12, 2024, <https://agwm.org/en/regions/africa/>.

<sup>31</sup> "Global Education of the PAOC," accessed August 14, 2024, <https://paoc.org/mission-global/programs/globaled>.

<sup>32</sup> "Apostolic Faith Mission," accessed August 14, 2024, <http://www.ptii.org/afm.html>.

more Pentecostal, theological training programs are needed to supply churches with well-trained pastors. In the past, schools that had expatriate missionary educators working alongside national trainers have produced transformational training systems. But several mission organizations report a decline in the number of missionary educators coming to the continent. And while the ultimate goal of indigenous Bible school education is a school with its own, highly qualified, national faculty and staff in the pursuit of high standards, collaboration in the training context with missionary educators, who bring a different worldview, enhances quality education.

Numerous training programs have been established by indigenous denominations and independent churches. APTEA could help them in their pursuit of excellence and offer accreditation, but gaining access to these institutions can be a struggle due to differences in doctrine and practice, language, geographical distance, busy schedules, and a lack of understanding regarding the benefits of accreditation. Even for the 100+ schools that are members of the association, less than half have completed a self-study in pursuit of accreditation. In these cases, school leadership does not recognize the benefits of a thorough self-study; or they are too busy with other issues to organize and start the process; or they assume their school cannot meet the standards, so why try? And as the association matures, it is a challenge to follow up with schools that need to renew their accreditation.

The current leadership team for APTEA is all volunteer, consisting of gifted people who carry numerous responsibilities beyond their involvement with the association. Where in the past the executive director also served as the director of Africa's Hope/ATTS, the current executive director functions as a local AGWM missionary on the continent, unlike the days of York, McClaflin, Kirsch, and Easter. Devoting time to engage member schools scattered over the continent requires additional commitment from these already loaded with local, national, and

international duties. And yet, attempts by APTEA leadership to engage local schools is needed especially at the regional and local levels. Accurate recordkeeping is challenging. The association is working to find efficient methods to maintain detailed records of those schools that have been and are being accredited, of teachers seeking certifications, and of members keeping their dues current. Africa's Hope, led by Rev. Randy Tarr, continues as a strong supporter of APTEA by assisting with finances for triennial conferences, producing curriculum for diploma programs, offering teacher seminars, creating software for library and academic operations, and conducting regional, educational seminars. The reality is that the APTEA team is small, and finances are limited, but the board and commission chairs are committed to fulfilling their mission to serve the educational needs of the continent and member schools.

Jesus Christ declared that he would build his church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). He also said that the harvest is great, but the laborers are few (Matt 9:37). Christ is building his church in Africa and the harvest is abundant, but trained, Pentecostal, biblically grounded, servant leaders are few. Academically and experientially equipped, relevant, and committed instructors are insufficient, whether they are indigenous or foreign. Bible schools with a robust faculty and strong curriculum, striving for excellence, are in short supply. Yet the need for hosts of trained pastors to plant new and lead established churches increases daily. An association like APTEA functioning on the continent of Africa is vital.

## **Conclusion**

In reflecting on the history of APTEA, several conclusions can be drawn. The mission of APTEA is not to recruit missionary and national educators. This must be a priority of mission organizations and national churches. But for schools and educators based on African soil, APTEA has the mandate to encourage them to participate as members of the association and



pursue accreditation through the self-study process. Schools need to require every member of their faculty to be teacher certified. African schools and national church leaders need to recognize the value of African contextualized theology and provide time and funding for their faculty to address critical spiritual and social issues through research and academic writing. Mission organizations and national churches, not just departments or committees, need to stand with APTEA to assure the quality performance of their Bible schools and institutions. The goal of having every Bible school accredited, all teachers certified, and many African faculty generating relevant, scholarly, Pentecostal materials, will require mission and national church engagement from the top echelons of these organizations, through their hierarchies of leadership, down to the local pastors and missionaries, who believe that trained, Pentecostal, biblically grounded, servant leaders are the hope for the transformation of Africa and the means for fulfilling the Great Commission.

### **Bio**

DMin, Bethel Theological Seminary; PhD, Regent University. Executive Director of APTEA; Chair of Bible/Theology Department, PThS (Togo); Administrator and Faculty Member, Global University MA Program, Addis Ababa Bible College, Ethiopia; Corrine and Doug have two married daughters serving as missionaries to Africa; Worked with AGWM/Africa for 30 years.