

Sierra Leone Annual Conference Newsletter

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Whitney Houston's Song Inspires Sierra Leone Bishop's New Year Message

US legendary musician, the late Whitney Houston's "I Look To You" was a source of inspiration for Sierra Leone Bishop Yambasu's New Year message to the capacity-full King Memorial United Methodist Church in Freetown.

Worshippers sang and danced to worship and praise songs led by the King Memorial Praise and Worship Choir. The satisfaction of contributing their first fruits – first collection on New Year Sunday – could be felt among the congregation. An atmosphere of celebration and joy filled

the air.

"We are going to do something special here today", the bishop announced as worshippers returned to their pews after the Praise and Worship session. A few sec-



Bishop Yambasu urges congregation to be more faithful

onds of unbroken silence immediately engulfed the church. Then, a gentle musical beat took over their expectant ears and the smooth, addictive and forever appetizing voice of the legend filled the air with "I Look to You".

Even unprepared-for-dancing heads began to nod in rhythm to the beat until the sound was lowered to a halt.

"For 2013, look up to God. That is my theme", Bishop Yambasu told congregation as the music died out.

(contd on page 3)

Sierra Leone and Norway Sign New Partnership



Dist. Supt. Rev Etta Nicol (standing) asks about role of the local church in the new project during the Bo beneficiary training

The United Methodist Church in Norway with support from the Norwegian government

has signed a five-year \$1,500,000M partnership with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to implement community Develop-

ment projects in Sierra Leone.

The Community Empowerment for Livelihood and Development
(see page 2)

...the four-year project will target women, children and the elderly and will be implemented through a consortium of ...three partners with credible record in health delivery services in the West African country .

UMC Hospital Benefits From Standard Chartered Health Grant

Lowell and Ruth Gess United Methodist Eye Hospital in eastern Freetown, has benefitted from a \$1,250,172 Standard Chartered-funded Comprehensive Eye Care in Sierra Leone project launched Wednesday January 23.

Covering all four regions in the country, the four-year project will target women, children and the elderly and will be implemented through a consortium of Christopher Blinden Mission (CBM- Lowell and Ruth Gess supporting partners), Helen Keller International (HKI) and Sight savers - three partners with credible record in health delivery services in the West African country.

Ministry of health data show that the prevalence of blindness in Sierra Leone is approximately 0.7% - affecting 43,842 people. Actual prevalence stands at 5.9% in people over 50 years old. Ninety –one per cent of all blindness in Sierra Leone is avoidable. Cataract is the major cause of blindness and severe visual impairment (SVI) in

Sierra Leone. The project will contribute to the reduction in avoidable blindness and vision impairment in Sierra Leone through country-wide provision of comprehensive eye care (CEC) services, targeting over 2,300,000 people over the four year project duration.

Dr Irmela Erdmann (left) CBM Medical Advisor on Eye Care and team explain new project to Bishop Yambasu (right) at UMC House on Tuesday January 22



Sierra Leone And Norway Sign New Partnership



Livelihood and Development (CELAD) program was signed in Freetown Wednesday January 9 by Tove Odland, General Secretary of Global Missions

UMC Norway on behalf of the United Methodist Church in Norway and Resident Bishop John K Yambasu on behalf of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. The program will focus mainly on empowering rural communities and people.

Launching the program earlier in Bo, southern Sierra Leone, CELAD program Director Smart Senesie said Jesus always manifested his compassion on people in need.

“...CELAD will exemplify practical Christianity. For far too long we have left our development programs and needs in the hands of non-governmental organizations, governments, etc and for far too long they have failed us. CELAD is putting the development programs and projects into the hands of communities. The difference this time round is that the people themselves will initiate, implement, monitor and make plans for sustainability of their own projects”, Senesie explained.

Bishop' New Year Message (contd)

Bishop Yambasu has made it a tradition since 2009, to preach at King Memorial UM Church – the denomination's largest congregation in the country - on every first Sunday in the New Year. So every first Sunday in the year, worshippers pour into King Memorial in their thousands to be blessed by the bishop's first Message in the New Year.

The Bishop cited Houston's many achievements during her life time: an actress, a producer, a model and named in the 2009 Guinness Book of Records as the most awarded female musician of her time. Yambasu said that Whitney Houston, though established as the world's most accomplished singer of our times was confronted with a host of problems ranging from drug abuse to financial problems.

"Whatever your circumstances church, look up to God", Yambasu asserted.

Quoting excerpts from the legend's song, the bishop said God is our ultimate hope and that mankind's efforts can only be rewarded if they are blessed by God. He said in desperate effort to free herself from drugs

and their associated problems, Houston turned to many sources for help as narrated in the song but regretted that worldly efforts did not pay off but had to turn to the ultimate solution – God.

'After all that I've been through

Who on earth can I turn to?
I look to you I look to you

After all my strength is gone

In you I can be strong
I look to you'

He said like Whitney Houston, Sierra Leoneans often have turned in many directions hoping for circumstances to change, yet the problems remain. He said to look up to God means that mankind must realize that our human efforts are futile without God; that no matter how much we put into life, if God is not included, our lives remain useless: implying that we need to totally surrender our lives to God, take the back seat and allow God to take the driving seat.

"Surrender your lives to God in 2013 and see if God will not pour unto you his supernatural favor and over-flowing blessings", the bishop reiterated.

Bishop Yambasu painted a vivid picture of the hardship in the country: financial problems, political problems (the country ended the year with a four-tier elections held in November) and other forms of difficulties.

"Prices have escalated to over 300% in this country yet we are living on the same salary as before. Our lives are full of problems. Businesses are failing. Things are so depressing that some people would wish to go to bed and not wake up the following morning. We have done everything possible to change our situation but all to no avail", he said.

The 2012 Global Hunger Index (GHI) launched in Freetown Thursday January 31 ranked Sierra Leone 71st out of 79 countries. The **Global Hunger Index (GHI)** is a multi-dimensional statistical tool used to describe the state of countries' [hunger](#) situation. The Index ranks countries on a 100 point scale, with 0 being the best score ("no hunger") and 100 being the worst. The higher the score, the worse the food situation of a country. Values less than 4.9 reflect "low hunger", values between 5 and (see page

"Prices have escalated to over 300% in this country, yet we are living on the same salary as before"

(Bishop's New Year Message)

values between 5 and 9.9 reflect "moderate hunger", values between 10 and 19.9 indicate a "serious", values between 20 and 29.9 are "alarming", and values exceeding 30 are "extremely alarming" hunger problem. In 2012, Sierra Leone scored 24.7.

"Some of us have even gone the African way. We have consulted soothsayers to find a way forward. We have gone to herbalists to wash ourselves because Sierra Leoneans believe in bad luck that herbalists are assumed to have power to cleanse", Yambasu said.

He challenged the fallacious bible quote that people often bandy around that 'God helps those who help themselves'.

He said there is no such bible verse and that God does things for us and that He

does not help us.

"He is our creator. And you don't need to help yourself", the bishop assured the congregation.

He said to look up to God implies that we have to realize that where our human efforts are not supported by God, they remain futile.

About her battle with drugs, Yambasu referred to a 2002 infamous interview Houston gave to Diane Sawyer. The pop icon Houston candidly spoke about her abuse of drugs such as cocaine which along with heart complications factored into her accidental drowning in her hotel bathroom tub February 11 2012.

He said he was aware that many people had already made their New Year reso-

lutions, but for those who could still accommodate something more, "I would strongly recommend that for 2013, you look up to God" in everything.

"We have used all kinds of juju and done every ungodly thing to change our circumstance for the better yet nothing seems to happen. We have depended on family and friends yet nothing happens".

He said some people have even applied their political connections yet the problems are far from over. Some others he said, grumble and blame others for their situations.

He urged that in 2013 the congregation must look up to God in whatever circumstances they find themselves.



Rev Alex Josaiah inducts a member of the United Methodist Special Program on Substance Abuse and Related Violence (SPSARV) school club at United Methodist Girls Secondary School in January.



In 2012, SPSARV trained about 81 Junior and Senior High school volunteers. Drug abuse in institutions of learning is a serious challenge in post-conflict Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone Annual Conference SPSARV program is forming school clubs to combat drug abuse. "The aim is to organize the boys and girls in the school SPSARV clubs to educate and influence their peers to refrain from drug abuse", Beatrice Fofanah, SPSARV African Task Force chairman says.