

Nigerian Church Aims To Evangelize U.S.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God has built its North American office in once-segregated rural Texas

In what some see as a role reversal, the Nigeria-based Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is building a North American headquarters as part of its ongoing mission to evangelize the U.S. and other parts of the world.

RCCG is constructing the facility on several hundred acres of pastureland it purchased in a back-road, north Texas community called Floyd. Just four decades ago a banner over the main county road read "Blackest Land, Whitest People."

Even today some residents of Floyd-population 100-have expressed discomfort with having large gatherings of Nigerians and an active church headquarters in their conservative Caucasian farm town.

Detroit pastor James Fadele, RCCG's North American chairman, said the ministry's goal is simply to reach the lost. "In the heart of every man is a vacuum [that] only God can fill," Fadele said. "Be it America or Africa, our objective is to preach Christ to the people so as to fill the vacuum.

"Our goal is to plant churches within 10 minutes' drive in every developed nation and within five minutes' walk in every developing nation ... until every nation in the world is reached for Jesus Christ our Lord."

Fadele said the most misunderstood concept about RCCG is that the church, which was born in Africa and internationally draws

a largely African attendance, must be only for Africans. "Every lost soul is a priority to the Lord," he told Charisma. "The soul of the African, European and American are all of equal value and worth to God. Jesus died for every lost soul."

RCCG reports more than 200 churches in the U.S. and between 2 million and 5 million members worldwide, with congregations in 90 nations. The church was founded in 1952 in Lagos, and is currently under the leadership of Enoch Adeboye. He has been quoted as saying the Floyd location was chosen because God told him to build there.

Each month, RCCG hosts an all-night prayer meeting at its Redemption Campground in Lagos that draws several hundred thousand people. Every December the RCCG Holy Ghost Congress reportedly draws around 7 million attendees.

Out of Africa, a 2004 Regal Books release edited by Global Harvest Ministries founder C. Peter Wagner and pastor Joseph Thompson, names RCCG as a significant leader in a burgeoning trend of Africans becoming missionaries to the U.S.

The book reports that Nigerians are planting more new churches outside their own country than Americans are planting outside theirs. It says Nigerians are creating larger churches-with an average of 500 members-than most American churches, which are comprised of 200 or fewer members.

It also reports that of the world's six continents, Africa is experiencing the most accelerated rate of church percent per year compared with .81 percent in North America.

Thompson, a native Nigerian and former teaching pastor at New

Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., said Africa's history of military rule and corruption, civil war, famine and oppression, coupled with its current soaring crime rate, unemployment, and overpopulation have provided the impetus for its turn toward Christianity.

"The Bible is very clear that God uses people who are broken and hungry for Him," said Thompson, whose own church, The Well in Lake Mary, Fla., is scheduled to launch in February.

"We have the West to thank for exposing us to the truth of Scripture," Thompson added, "but then again, it is the mind-set of the West that has become a hindrance to the church in America-keeping Christians from being able to experience the full power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Our first recourse is God, while for Westerners God is often the last recourse when every other means has failed."

Thompson said the same African culture that once wrapped its arms around the power of witch doctors and the demonic today is more open to the spiritual aspects of Christianity. Although Westerners have a tendency to intellectualize miracles away, he said, Africans embrace them.

Some media have reported that plans for the Floyd campus include an elaborate Disneyland-like facility with a 10,000-seat sanctuary, lecture centers, dormitory, lake and Christian-themed water park-amenities similar to the ones at the church's 18,000-acre Redemption City global headquarters in Lagos.

However, James Alao, overseer of the Floyd RCCG campus, said that as of press time nothing more specific than the initial

building, which is structurally complete and features a 700-person meeting area and modest office facilities, has been confirmed.

The RCCG ministers' conference Oct. 20-22 marked the first official gathering at the new Floyd headquarters. In June 2007 the Floyd campus will be the site of RCCG's North American Convention.

Marcia Davis-Seale in Floyd, Texas