

Church and State Relations: A Pragmatic Conduit for Empowering the Girl Child Through Secondary School Education. A Case Study of Adventist Girls' Senior High School (ADGISS) Ntonso Ashanti, Ghana

Philip Oti-Agyen

Department of Educational Leadership, College of Technology Education, Kumasi, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Abstract

The paper focuses on the steady development of the Adventist Girls Senior High School (ADGISS) Ntonso Ashanti, Ghana. It specifically discusses the teething challenges that bedeviled the School and the concerted efforts by transformational leaders, both within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church and the State to ensure the accelerated development of the School. The study further seeks to highlight the point that effective leadership and consensus-building are pivotal to the establishment, maintenance and solidification of educational institutions. The main instruments used for the study were documentary sources (primary and secondary) and oral interviews. The primary documentary sources as one of the major sources were largely composed of files from Kwabre District Education Office, Handing-Over Notes of a School Head, a School log book, Minutes of Board of Governors meetings and statistical reports. Oral interviews were also held with six people who were participants in the study and could therefore provide eye-witness accounts. The information retrieved from the above sources were analysed and discussed thematically. The major findings were that even though the School was set up in 1998 up as a co-educational institution to train the youth to be responsible in future and to support the activities of the SDA Church, it was transformed into a purely female institution after seven years of its existence, to primarily meet the exigencies of the time. The transformation of the School though fraught with challenges, proved to be a blessing in terms of academic excellence, moral development and physical fitness.

Keywords: Adventist, Church, moral development, Adventist Girls Senior High School, Ntonso-Ashanti,

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that The Adventist Girls Senior High School (ADGISS) at Ntonso-Ashanti has had a chequered history; and it appears that any attempt to reconstruct the past of this institution, which is currently experiencing phenomenal expansion will end up in recounting both the pleasant and bitter leadership experiences of the Ntonso Seventh day Adventist (SDA) Church, in its attempt to contribute its quota towards national development through educational provision and practice. Woven into this somewhat complex history of the school are the invaluable support offered by the leadership of the larger SDA Church, particularly the Central Ghana Conference of SDA, Kumasi, Ghana, the timely intervention of His Royal Majesty, Otumfour Osei Tutu II, the King of Ashanti Kingdom, Ghana, the active involvement of political functionaries and the profound interest in the School exhibited by the people and traditional authorities of Ntonso and Nsuta communities all in Ashanti Region of Ghana.

One would, however, not hesitate to admit that the tensions, anxieties and frustrations experienced by the founding fathers, church members, staff of the school, and the entire Ntonso community have largely concurred to facilitate the steady growth of the School and celebrating the overall success story of ADGISS could be said to be worthwhile; a palpable lesson that effective leadership is resilient and resolute in all circumstances particularly when it is convinced of the rightness of its actions

It is also noteworthy that in all the circumstances leading to the establishment of ADGISS, almost all the key players and actors recognized (and still recognize) the transformational leadership of God; thereby stressing the supernatural dimension of the events culminating to the founding and steady growth of the School.

2. Objectives of the Study

The thrust of subsequent discussions therefore seek to examine the role of both human and divine leadership in the early beginnings and steady progress of ADGISS. It further analyses the achievements, and challenges that confronted the School and how they were reacted to by church, school, traditional and political leaders. Specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. Discussing the early beginnings of the School;
- b. Analyzing the initial factors that militated against the establishment of the School;
- c. Examining the renewal of interest of interest in the school;
- d. Discussing the transition of the School from Co-educational to a female institution and;
- e. Examining the achievements and challenges of the School

3. Significance of the Study

Significantly, such a historical reconstruction of the school would, inter alia, enable key stakeholders in the provision and practice of education in Ghana and the SDA church, in particular, to reflect upon their leadership experiences in educational provision and utilize the emanating lessons to improve upon similar and future endeavours. It would also help the government, in particular, to deepen its appreciation of the challenges that have often confronted private initiatives in educational provision, particularly at the second cycle level, and thus take pragmatic steps to strengthen their collaboration for holistic education.

4. Methodology of the Study

The study is basically qualitative and utilizes historical methods. In vein, office records, official reports and formal speeches by school heads, minutes of School Management/Board, as well as oral interviews with persons who could provide authentic eye-witness accounts regarding the major developments in ADGISS were largely utilized. Secondary sources in the form of books were also utilized. Data retrieved from the various sources, as shown above were analyzed thematically.

5. Early Beginnings of the School: The Context/Study Area

The popularity of secondary education in Ashanti Region of Ghana in general and the Kwabre District where Ntonso is located, in particular, had already sky-rocked by the early 1970s. Even though the Region, in most part of the nineteenth century was resistant to Western formal education, there was positive change in attitude in the early part of the twentieth century (Agbodeka, 1971; McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975). From this time onwards, the number of schools in the region increased quite substantially. Records at the Kwabre East District of Education in Ashanti part of Ghana, where ADGISS is located indicate that, the District alone has nine Senior High Schools as at December, 2015 (Kwabre East District Education Office, 2016).

The Ntonso Ashanti township is still famous for the production of *Adinkra*: mourning clothes for funeral rites (Agbo, 2011) and *Kente*, a priceless and the most valuable cloth most Ghanaians wear on all festive occasions. By the 1970s the brisk commercial activities there had been buoyed up by another vigorous business in Tie and Dye. These local vocational activities notwithstanding, the leadership of the Ntonso SDA Church comprising three elders, namely John Oti, Samuel Gyebi and Peter Boakye were contemplating on establishing an educational institution, preferably, an “international school” at the basic level along the lines of Amakom SDA preparatory school in Kumasi, then at its formative stages at Ntonso Ashanti (Oral Interview with elder Peter Boakye, one of the three elders who mooted the idea for the establishment of the school on 23rd February, 2016). What was significant was that John Oti and Samuel Gyebi did not have any formal education. Even though Peter Boakye had some formal education, it was at the basic level. Their plan to set up a private church school was also remarkable in the sense that local private initiative in the provision of formal education was uncommon in rural settings and for these leaders to have conceived the idea was clearly suggestive of dynamism and creativity.

The idea of the “international school” was later abandoned and taking inspiration from the personal initiatives of one Mr. Simms Kofi Mensah, who had single handedly put up a school in his hometown, Fawoade Ashanti, in 1978, and the encouragement from the then illustrious Chief of Ntonso Ashanti, Nana Konadu Ababio II, the three leaders of the Church who could be aptly described as the “inspirational trio” convinced the leadership of the Church of the need to establish an Adventist Secondary School at Ntonso Ashanti to train the youth of the town and its environs to become responsible persons in future and to contribute to the growth of the Church (Oral Interview with elder Peter Boakye, on 23rd February, 2016).

The Church enthusiastically supported the idea of establishing a school, and not too long afterwards, a large stretch of land, was donated to the Church by the Chief, Nana Konadu Ababio II, to start the project. Through the wise counsel and encouragement of the Chief and opinion leaders in the town, the Ntonso SDA Church was full of confidence to see the project started. With the acquisition of land, there was every indication that the Adventist school project was going to be carried out without delay; however, the initial enthusiasm that welcomed the idea of the secondary school project in the Church was threatened by an internal misunderstanding.



The above photograph showing the “inspirational trio”, Elders John Oti, extreme right, Peter Boakye followed by Samuel Gyebi, extreme left, A.K.Brempong (standing) and C.K Mensah sitting on the bonnet of Elder John Oti’s 504 Peugeot car in front of the six-classroom block of ADGISS, discussing the way forward for the school in the early 1980s.

6. The School’s Sign Post debate: The First Crack in the Unity of the Church

The first sign of disagreement in the at Ntonso over the school project was the erection of a big sign post in front of the newly acquired land for the School by the *inspirational trio*. The inscription on the sign board was no doubt catchy: *Land for the Proposed SDA Secondary School at Ntonso Ashanti. Keep Off!* The size of the sign post and its conspicuous features quickly attracted the attention of the public and Church members as well. As usual, various comments regarding the usefulness of the sign post were made but the comments by Church members and their polarizing effects on the church are worthy of reflection. Three factions, as a result of the sign board, quickly emerged in the church but with tenacity of purpose, the challenge was surmounted.

One faction felt that the putting up of the sign post at that early stage was unnecessary; describing the whole act as presumptuous and needless. Members of this faction who could be described as the “moderates” contended that since the project had not taken off, some caution must be exercised in projecting it because nobody knows what would happen in future. The project might not even be carried out at all. Such a position, one would say, belonged to the realist’s philosophical school of thought. Once the establishment of the school had not been materialized and remained an idea or a vision, there was no need to advertise or parade it so conspicuously. The other faction, the radicals (the existentialists with the faith of the knight) who supported the hoisting of the sign post, argued that there was nothing wrong in making your intensions known to the public. Apart from the fact such an action could ward off possible encroachers whose nefarious activities were rampant in those days, well-wishers and philanthropists could be sympathetic and offer moral and financial assistance to the School project. It could also continually serve as a reminder to members to ‘gird their loins’ for the uphill task ahead. The other groups, the “neutralists”, were somehow quiet, looking forward to what would happen in the future. As the arguments got protracted, their effects on the School project, right from the outset, were becoming negative and the unity of purpose which had hitherto characterized the activities of the church got severely threatened.

It is significant that, as the hot arguments over the usefulness of the sign post were gradually being laid to settle, information reached the church, one morning, that, the sign post had been razed down by a raging bush fire, popularly referred to as the 1983 bushfires” in Ghana which also destroyed a lot of farmlands in the neighbourhood. Quickly, the dust settled and the factional arguments ceased. Divine providence, it was believed by most Church Members had settled the matter. Nobody was wrong except that God wanted the hitherto unity to be restored for the school project to begin without delay. By all indications, the project was destined to succeed and clearly, there was unity of purpose in the Church again and the resolve to establish the school was even further renewed. Following this, the church board got to task and divided members of the church into groups and each group was given a specific day to work (clearing the land, fetching water, making bocks and digging foundation) on the project.

The sign post debate was probably a palpable signal of creating awareness in the church that things were not going to be smooth with the school project and that challenges were inevitable, but with divine intervention and effective democratic, all inclusive and visionary leadership styles, the church was going to succeed on the understanding that unity could exist even in diversity. The unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17: 11 was going to be the common denominator on which the church was going to triumph.

7. The “Taxing” of Church Members for the School Project: Another Hurdle to be cleared

The closure of the sign board arguments was a big relief to the Church but another serious issue which was more crippling was on the way: the financing of the School. It must be said that at the time when the idea of the School was mooted, the church did not have enough money to finish the project at once. The three leaders of the Church at the time had an optimistic philosophy that inadequate financial resources should not be a constraint for doing something worthwhile. Once there was a will, there was a way. What was required under the circumstance was unity of purpose, determination and commitment to bequeath a legacy to the younger generation.

With this philosophy in mind, the *inspirational trio* thought of a financial plan for the School project in the early 1983 and laid it before the Church. According to the plan, all men and women in the church were to pay monthly dues of forty pesewas and twenty pesewas respectively. They added strictly that payment of the dues was not compulsory but each member should endeavour to honour this financial obligation. In addition, certain days in the week were devoted for a sort of this financial communal labour where all adult members of the Church and their compatriots from the Ntonso community were to work on the school project, in terms of helping to lay the foundation of the building, moulding of blocks, carrying of mortar, weeding around and other activities (oral interview with elder Samuel Agyeman on 28th February, 2016 at Ntonso- Ashanti).

It is a fact that enthusiasm of the Church members at work was very high and within a relatively short period of time, the foundation of the first six classroom block was solidly laid and the erection of the building to the lentil level started in earnest in 1984 [See photograph in p.4]. However, another stumbling block was soon to rear its ugly head not too long after the implementation of these financial and labour arrangements. The financial arrangements as explained above were questioned by some sections of the Church, particularly the youth. They questioned the rationale of “taxing” Church members for the project. They argued that in both the Bible and SDA prophetic books, there was nowhere the church has been mandated to take “taxes” from its members. The *inspirational trio* and some adults in the church also felt that the monthly contributions or dues were not the same as taxing the people. It was rather a democratic way of ensuring systematic flow of money in the Church for the project since there was no compulsion in the payment. Secondly, the contributions were not going to be a permanent feature in the church. It would disappear after the project. The ensuing debate was more protracted and emotive than the sign board issue.

Once again, the church was sharply divided and with time the motivation and enthusiasm of the church for the project went down so much that the entire project had to be suspended, since new leaders who were subsequently appointed were in a fix; and probably did not want the Church to be so divided because of the School project. This time of suspension, they thought could heal the division that had cropped up in the church. Meanwhile, the building which was at the lentil stage was left to be overshadowed by bushes (Oral Interview with elder Clement Obeng on 28th February, 2016 at Ntonso- Ashanti)

After about three years of abandonment, the Church got back to the school project in the mid-1980s. By this time tempers had cooled and renewal of interest in the school project was at its zenith. A new method of funding the project, which was considered quite conciliatory, was put in place. That was the “monthly harvest” system. At the end of every month, an offertory bowl would be put on a table in front of the pulpit and church members would individually walk to the bowl and on their own volition put their money donation into the bowl. At the end of the harvest, the money deposited in the bowl would be counted and put into the school project account. With this measure in place, peace was restored and the school project continued. Luckily, it was around this time that SAWS later known as Adventist Relief Agency (ADRA) came in to support the School project by providing roofing for the abandoned six classroom block, food and other essential commodities to the church for the upkeep of the School project. With this support, some Church members decided that they would devote themselves entirely to the project by working at the project site every day and this brought the institution called, in local language, *Atuwohoakyefo* literally translated as the voluntary group (Oral Interview with Theresa Nyamaah I on 6th March, 2016, Ntonso-Ashanti). These measures, notwithstanding, progress was rather slow due mainly to general economic difficulties in the country coupled with the departure of most of the youth in the Church to Nigeria to seek for greener pastures.

8. Renewal of interest in the School Project: A Turning Point and a Challenge: The Era of Odomse Akuoko Nyantakyi as the leader of the School

Even though the school project, from time to time, was interrupted due to difficulties, it had not been all together forgotten. It seemed that the Church was waiting for a propitious time for its financial position to be improved in

order to get back to the project. By this time, the *inspirational trio* was no longer at the helms of affairs because of change of leadership and their leadership drive soon got lost. They however remained resolute and gave unflinching support to the project. Fortunately, this was the time the Central Ghana Conference of SDA Church, Ghana, under the leadership of Pastor Abraham Peter Mensah and the Ghana Union Conference in collaboration with the Ntonso SDA Church put the already existing six classroom block into shape for the School to officially begin in 1998 as a co-educational Adventist Secondary/ Technical School (ASTECH) with an enrolment of 52 students (ASTECH Log Book, 1998). With the support of the Kwabre District of Education, the SDA Conference and other philanthropists, some basic equipment and other logistics were procured and dwelling mostly on part-time teachers, the School, in spite of teething challenges, officially opened September, 1998 under the headmastership of Mr. Asirifi Boampong whose tenure of office was rather short-lived (Odomse, 2007).

It is notable that, it was at this time of the inception of the school that the ownership school land donated by the chief (now deceased) was contested; leading gradually to a crippling dispute on the School land that would forever stand as a “blight spot” in the annals of the School. This time the threat to the survival of the school was external rather than internal.

The appointment of Pastor Odomse Akuoko Nyantakyi, a newly trained professional educator from Newbold College in England with Master’s Degree in Education as Headmaster of the School, from 1999 to 2007 was indeed a great blessing to the school (ASTECH Log, 1998). With determination and unflinching support of both the Ntonso SDA Church and the Central Ghana Conference of SDA, Pastor Odomse, provided a transformational leadership, which could be said to be the turning point in the history of the school.

Taking advantage of the willingness of the Ntonso SDA Church members in particular and traditional authorities to support the growth of the School, and a relatively prolonged period of his tenure, the Headmaster with the support of the skeletal staff at the time, braved the odds and set about to establish SDA second cycle educational institution well poised for the provision of a balanced and holistic education. It was at this time that the dispute over the School land was aggravated. The claim that the land for the school belonged to government and not the Ntonso SDA Church was the bone of contention. Probably, it was thought by the opposition group in the neighbourhood of Ntonso that the School was a private institution and therefore would benefit only members of the SDA church. On the other hand, the SDA Church and most non-Adventists including some traditional authorities were also convinced that once the School was established, irrespective of its owner, it was going to benefit not only SDA members but people within both the Ntonso community and the country as a whole. The harrowing experiences that SDA Church members, foremost among were elder Adomako Mensah, who spent almost all his time on the School, Inspector Yaw Yeboah, former Assembly member, the veteran educationist and former Kumasi Metropolitan Director of Education, I.K. Boateng, and some traditional leaders including the late Nana Osei Ababio (Akwammuhene), went through as a result of the land dispute would require additional pages to elucidate (Oral interview with elder Adomako on 6th March, 2016, Ntonso-Ashanti).

The land dispute prolonged for close to a decade and numerous experiences could be said to have been learnt. However, as a Church, three important lessons could be analyzed. In the first place, it became abundantly clear that God still leads His people and once they pursue noble deeds, He would always vindicate them. Secondly, it proved that avoidable delays must not be allowed to hamper developmental projects. If the Ntonso SDA Church had continued with the initial zeal and devotion with which they tackled the project in the early 1980s, a lot of suffering and hardships would have been avoided. Thirdly, the moral support provided by the Ntonso/Nsuta traditional authority and the timely intervention of His Royal Majesty, Otumfour Osei Tutu II, the king of Ashanti, which led to the eventual solving of the dispute provided an ample testimony of the massive recognition of education in the Ashanti kingdom, as the most important vehicle for socio-economic development. Available records indicate that a 53.04 acres of land were leased to the school through the magnanimity and instrumentality of the King of Ashanti, Otumfour Osei Tutu II. (Odomse, 2007). With the settlement of the land dispute, an avenue was opened for the accelerated development of the School. No doubt, the Headmaster, his assistant, Madam Paulina Agyekum, the Ntonso SDA Church, members of parliament, particularly, Honourable Kofi Frimpong, and Assembly men and a host of other distinguished personalities, embarked upon steady physical development of the School. In addition, the enrolment drive was a bit buoyed up and both academic and non-academic staff numbers were strengthened.

9. Sponsorship, Donations and Moral Support to the School: A Worthwhile Collaboration

As a private local initiative, the burden of funding the school was solely borne by the Ntonso SDA Church. Payment of teachers’ salaries and the procurement of basic logistics for the smooth running of the School were carried out by the church through monthly harvest which was instituted after the cancellation of the monthly dues right from the inception of the School in 1998. Apart from financial support, some Church elders and educationists have continued to play pivotal roles in the development of the School. Foremost among them are elders Adomako Mensah, Samuel Agyemang, Robert Dwamena, Clement Obeng, Samuel Tawiah, Nicholas Asante, A.K. Brempong (deceased), Mrs. Hannah Amo Agyeman. Mr. I.K. Boateng, chairman of the School’s

Management Board for many years deserve commendation for their sacrifice and devotion. The Central Ghana Conference of SDA and the Ghana Union Conference also contributed tremendously toward the success story of the School. Also worthy of commendation is the entire Ntonso Ashanti community and its traditional leaders for the huge support offered to the School. Available records indicate that the Central Ghana Conference of SDA Church, for example, assumed full responsibility to provide subsidy for tuition from 2004/2005 academic year until the absorption of the school by the government (Odomse, 2007).

Prior to this intervention by the Conference, the School had already benefitted from the benevolence of the Canadian Lutheran World Relief which provided half of the cost of the construction of Computer/ Library Centre through the initiative of Enoch Oduro, a native of Ntonso domiciled in Canada, who additionally drilled a borehole for the school. After the completion of the block, a quantity of assorted books was shipped from the USA by Mr. & Mrs. Osei Boakye, both natives of Ntonso, to stock the newly constructed library. Dr. Kofi Mensah (KooBen) also donated some money for furniture, landscaping and tree planting in the school. Dr. Ohene Konadu, Professor Owusu Mensa, Dr. Robert Gardiner (England), Mr. Elvis Baah Gyebi, Captain Retired Gyebi Bediako, Mr. Koforobour Agyemang, Mr. John Akuoko-Akuoko Nyantakyi, Mr Owusu Aduomi, Mr. Osei Kwaku, Mr. Dacosta Yeboah, Pastor Stephen Addo(deceased), Pastor Pastor J. K. Mensah, E.O. Kanya, Alhaji Kwasi Yeboah (former DCE of Kwabre District), Hon. Lawyer Osei Prempeh, Lawyer Owusu Afriyie (Sir John), Hon. Joe Donkor (former Deputy Minister of Education), Ms. Lydia Osei, (former Deputy Director-General of Education), Mrs. Agyemang Duah (Director, CRD), deserve commendation for their immense contributions to the development of the School. The name of the Member of Parliament for Kwabre East, Hon. Kofi Frimpong, would always be written in the letters of gold in the annals of the Schools. The phenomenal expansion of the School today and its transformation could largely be attributed to his initiatives and constant support. His predecessor, Honourable Nana Asante Frempong was also very instrumental in the extension of electricity to the school in 20011 (Odomse, 2007).

The gallant pioneer staff also made substantial contributions in the arduous process of surmounting the initial challenges that bedeviled the School. Foremost among them were Messrs. Asirifi Boampong, Asamoah, Adu Boahen, Amo Asante, Kwaku Asante, Anthony Amoah, Pastor Kwadwo Owusu Ansah, Ms. Afua Tiwaa Asare Bediako, Mrs. Theresah Agyapong, Mrs. Comfort Agyekum Boateng, Evelyn Agyemang Boadu, Mrs. Naomi Yeboah, Ms. Beatrice Akuffo, Mrs. Leticia Mensah, Ms. Christiana Sarpong, Ms. Mary Sarhene and Ms. Paulina Agyekum, the current Headmistress (Odomse, 2007).

In addition, the tremendous role played by the people and traditional authority of Ntonso township and the paramount chief of Nsuta in ensuring that the dispute on the school's land was amicably settled cannot be overemphasized. The diplomacy, tact and firmness of leadership skills displayed by Otumfour Osei Tutu II, the King of the Ashanti Kingdom in solving the land altercation were remarkable. Eventually, the Ashanti King leased out a 53.4-acre land to the School. Other organizations and some personalities also made substantial moral and physical contributions to the School but for lack of space their names cannot be mentioned but it is believed that the celebration today has provided an amply testimony of their silent heroic deeds. May they live long and enjoy the fruits of their labour.

10. The Transition from Co-educational Second Cycle Institution to a Female Second Cycle Institution: A Feat worth Celebrating

The celebration of the tenth anniversary of the school largely focused on the successful existence of the ten-year period of the institution as the only Adventist second-cycle female educational institution in the country. But as already said, the school started as a co- educational (mixed) institution in 1998 in line with the traditional philosophy of the SDA Church, almost eighteen years now. The transformation of the School into a single-sex female school took place in 2004 and by September, 2005, the Ghana Education Service had absorbed the school into the public stream of the Ghanaian educational system (Nsowah, 2005) and, by that action, stripped it of its private ownership. Like other mission schools, its operation came under the phenomenon often referred to as "dual control" underscoring the partnership between the government and the SDA Church in terms of the overall development of the School. It is significant, to note that, an arrangement was made to allow the students who were admitted to the School before 2005 to write their final WAEC examination at the Bantama Adventist Senior High School. Most of these students have successfully graduated from the various universities in the country and are working in the various parts of the country; contributing the quota toward national development. Circumstances leading to the transformation of the School are interesting to study in the light of Adventist philosophy of education and historical development of SDA education in the country. The SDA Church has largely emphasized co-education throughout its existence. The Church believes that such an educational system could foster an effective socialization process between young men and women as they prepare for their future family lives. Historically, all SDA schools, particularly at the second-cycle level, have been co-educational. The Bekwai, Agona, Bantama, Kenyasi, Kofiase SDA Senior High Schools (SHS) all in Ashanti are all co-educational. The Koforidua SDA College of Education in the Eastern Region and Kwadaso SDA Nurses

Training also in Ashanti are also co-educational. The pertinent question is: “what was the motivation for this phenomenal structural change at the Ntonso SDA secondary school?” Interestingly, the transformation was even questioned by some church members and some sections of the Ntonso community. Their concerns were not so much aimed at the maintenance of the status quo in relation to the time-honoured SDA philosophy, but on the pragmatic principle of enabling boys from poor families within the community to have access to secondary education as day students.

These concerns, notwithstanding, the transformation of the School was effected and the factors accounting for it are worthy of analysis. In his *Handing over Speech Notes*, the then Headmaster, Odomse Akuoko Nyantakyi enumerated about five reasons that necessitated the transformation of the School into a single sex female institution as follows:

- a. poor enrolment;
- b. high cost of tuition;
- c. undeveloped status of the six second cycle institutions in Kwabre;
- d. embargo on absorption of new schools and;
- e. close proximity of Gyama Pensa SHS. (Odomse,2007)

One would therefore infer that from the above reasons that, the transformation was primarily due to the mixture of compelling social factors and contextual exigencies; a palpable signal that the Church is a social institution that is bound to examine its continuous utilitarian functions in the light of larger contextual conditions. It must quickly learn from social indicators and keep abreast of time when such required dynamism does not contravene the principles of the Bible.

The inability of the local Church and the SDA Conference to continue to finance the School, by the early 2000, strongly suggested an alternative approach to maintain the school and collaborating with the government appeared to be the best option. Under the circumstance, the Church, therefore, had to convince the government of the urgent need for the absorption of the school into the public system of education. Meanwhile, as pointed out by the then headmaster, the Kwabre District, had quite a number of government assisted second cycle institutions which were already in dire need of logistical help and the government naturally felt that the challenge of inadequate resources for the already existing public second cycle institutions must not be compounded by accepting more responsibility. The Church therefore had a huge task in convincing the government to absorb the School into the public stream.

10.1 The Argument of Uniqueness

The Church, in collaboration with the management of the School, and through the instrumentality of the MP, Hon. Kofi Frimpong, considered an option that would make the school unique among schools in the Kwabre District, in particular, and the SDA Church in general. The option was the transformation of the School from a co-educational institution into a single sex female institution. Government, very interested in the girl-child education, embraced the idea and absorbed the School into the public stream in September, 2005 (Nsowah, 2005). Indeed, the wisdom in this decision by the Church has been underscored by the phenomenal expansion of the School and the monumental achievements of the School within the past ten years.

11. Fire outbreaks in the School - Tragedy of the Decade: Blessing in Disguise?

Two years after government’s absorption of the School which had now become a full- fledged female institution; it came under the leadership of Madam Paulina Agyekum who was, hitherto, serving as Assistant Headmistress of the School. There was no doubt that the School was poised for steady development. She had accumulated a lot of experience and knowledge about the School and there was no doubt that the School was going to thrive under her leadership. In all dimensions, there were palpable signs of accelerated development and phenomenal expansion. Student population rose to 1469 in 2011/2012 academic year and by the end of 2012/2013 academic year, the population stood at 1565 (Agyekum, 2014). The number of both teaching and non-teaching staff, according to the Headmistress rose from 35 in 2005/2006 academic year to 113 in 2013/2014. (Agyekum, 2014). Just as everything seemed to be moving quite smoothly, “the school was hit by series of fire outbreaks between September, 2011 and April 2012” (Agyekum, 2014). According to the Headmistress “the two most devastating outbreaks occurred on September, 25th and 29th 2011. The author of this article bear witness to this disaster as he personally observed the ravages of the burnt dormitory with the contents of some rooms totally destroyed. It was indeed a sad spectacle to behold the extremely worried faces of the students and a housemistress who were deprived of all their personal properties on those fateful days. What was so fortunate about the tragedy was that no human life was lost because any time the fire outbreak occurred; all the students were at prep in their various classrooms. This swift divine intervention was just beyond comprehension. Another unforgettable lesson in these tragedies is the indispensability of the maintenance of discipline in all human institutions particularly educational institutions. If the School authority had relented in its efforts in ensuring that all the students were at the right place at the right (in their class rooms learning), a lot of human lives could have been destroyed.

The consequences of the fire disasters on the School were devastating. The Headmistress noted that “the outbreaks appeared to have shaken the very foundation of the school” (Agyekum, 2014). Apart from destruction of property, the psychological trauma experienced by the students were too bitter a pill for the School to swallow at this time of its existence; emerging from many challenges. How could the female students be convinced to sleep in a dormitory block, part of it had been gutted down by fire? How was the news of the fire outbreaks going to be received by the public and its consequent effects enrolment in the school? The practicality of these questions and others could have dampened the spirit of stakeholders “but for the School’s resilience” (Agyekum, 2014) and the massive support of the School by the Church, the Ministry of Education and numerous philanthropists, the doom which had overshadowed the School turned into a blissful opportunity. For example, the swift intervention of the Hon. Kwame Peprah, former Ghanaian Minister of Finance and Mr. Antwi Gyamfi in putting up a dormitory for the School and other donations in the form of school uniforms and sandals, foam mattresses, a set of television, household items made by individuals, government appointees, the Ministry of Education, the PTA, the SDA Church in general and other philanthropists virtually turned the whole disaster into a blessing. A building contractor, Mr. George Asumadu also worked tirelessly, linking with the appropriate government agency to construct a number of buildings in the school. By his commitment and devotion to the school, he proved that a friend in need is a friend indeed.

The SDA Church, in particular, has been of the conviction, upon reflection, that the Almighty God really turned a misfortune into a blessing for the School. It is however hoped that the cause(s) of the fire outbreaks, which are still being investigated, would quickly be identified for the adoption of effective measures to forestall future occurrences.

12. Achievements of the School

The achievements of the School from the time of absorption till now would be discussed under the following categories: Academic (Intellectual), Moral (spiritual); Physical (Health and Sports) and Infrastructural development. The justification for using the above parameters lies in the definition of education as given by Ellen White. According to her, true education means harmonious development of all the faculties (mental/intellectual, moral/spiritual and physical/skills) of the human being (White, 1952).

12.1 Academic/Intellectual Activities

Undoubtedly, academic/intellectual work constitutes the core business of all educational institutions. To a large extent, one can say that, the direct relevance of an academic institution is measured by its academic achievements. Currently the school has expanded its academic programmes into five main areas namely: General Arts, Business (Accounting Option), Vocational (Home Economics), Vocational (Visual Arts) and General Science. (Office of the Headmistress,2016). Available records indicate that throughout the ten-year period, the general performance of the students, particularly, in the final examinations organized by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) has been very encouraging.

This feat has been possible due to an improved teaching and learning situation in the school. Quality of staff has improved considerably with the appointment of teachers with requisite qualification and expertise in their various areas of specializations. As at February, 2016, the total number of teaching staff was 69. The student-population was 1552 (Office of the Headmistress, 2016).In addition, the School has recorded brilliant performances in various inter school debates. Available records show that the School represented Ashanti Region on two occasions at the Northern Zonal Inter School Debate Competition, and on each occasion, it occupied the second position. (Agyekum, 2014).

12.2 Moral/ Spiritual Development

The moral/spiritual development of students forms an integral component of the general activities of the school. The Chaplaincy Board, in collaboration with the School administration has been organizing various religious programmes aimed at character development and spiritual growth. Foremost among these programmes are morning devotions, mid-week prayer sessions, Sabbath worships and weeks of spiritual emphasis. Records indicate that from 2008 to 2012, a total number of 418 students were baptized into the institutional Church (Agyekum, 2014).

The consequences of these religious activities are largely evident in the peace and tranquility that have prevailed in the School over the past decade. No student demonstration/strike has occurred in the School for the past ten years and this is largely attributable to the high moral consciousness prevalent among the students inspired by the understanding that the utilization of dialogue to address grievances is superior to the avenues of chaos and anarchy.

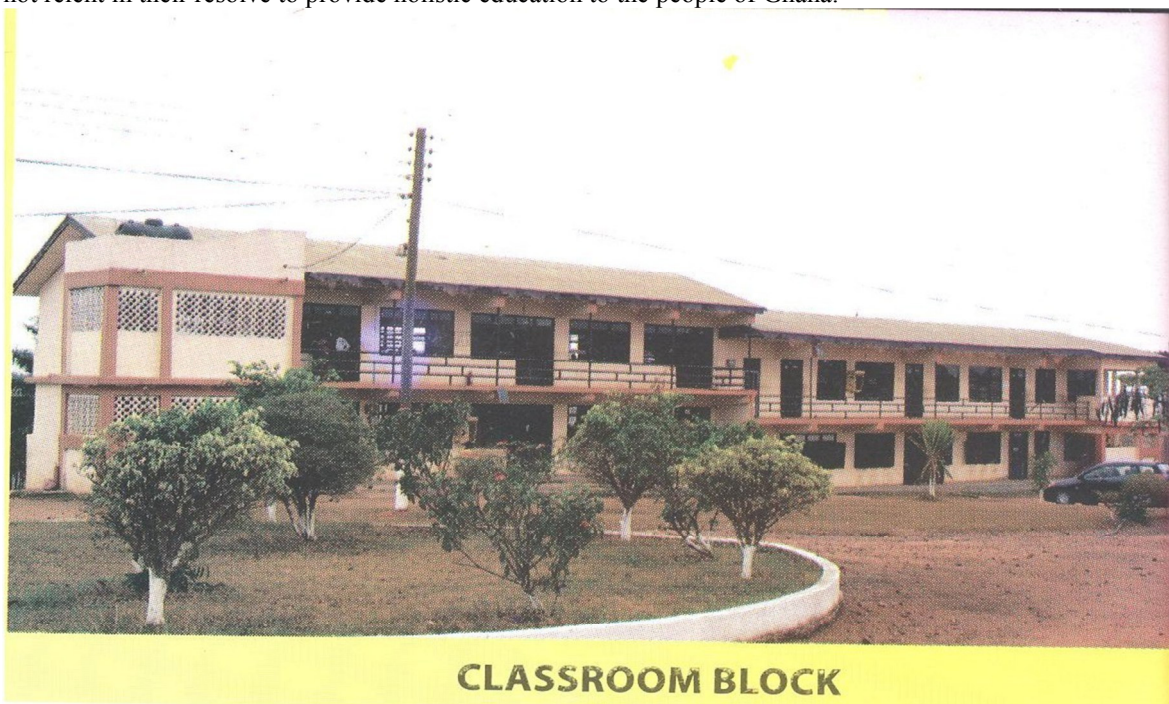
12.3 Physical Development (Health and Sports)

Intellectual alertness must keep pace with moral development and physical fitness. Physical activities in the form

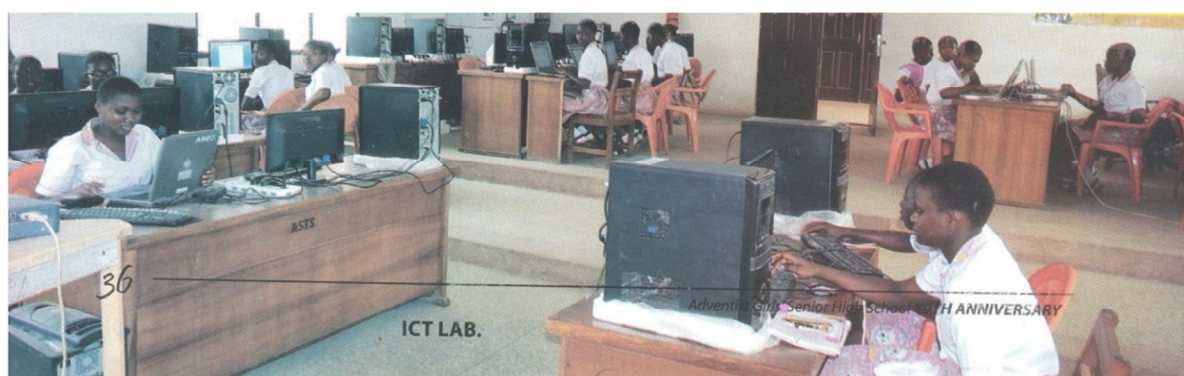
of trotting, athletics, sports constitute an important facet of the school's timetable. It has always participated in the regional inter-school athletic female competition at the Kumasi Sports stadium and has favourably competed with other schools. On three occasions, the school won the prestigious award of "Best Behaved School" in the whole Ashanti region, a monumental tribute to the high moral standing prevalent in the school. (Oral interview with Paulina Agyekum, Headmistress, Ntonso, 2014).

12.4 Infrastructural/Physical Development

The physical appearance of the school could be favourably compared to any modern second cycle educational institution in the country. The beautiful landscape and aesthetic lay-out of the school which started during the time of the second headmaster, Pastor Odomse Akuoko Nyantakyi, from 1999 to 2007, has been very facilitative of creating congenial atmosphere for effective academic work in the school. Quite a number of buildings have been put up under dynamic leadership of Ms. Paulina Agyekum, the current Headmistress and the active support of the (Parent-Teacher Association) PTA. The buildings include: Three classroom blocks (two of them are storey buildings), Assembly Hall, a modern kitchen and a dining hall, four dormitory blocks (three of them storey buildings), Headmistress bungalow, three bungalows (each containing four flats) for staff, a library/computer building, Practical room for Home Economics, school field, Church house (under construction) and four boreholes, two of which are mechanized. A generator plant has also been purchased for the school by the PTA. There is no doubt that the School is experiencing phenomenal expansion and it is hoped that stakeholders would not relent in their resolve to provide holistic education to the people of Ghana.



A two-storey classroom block of ADGISS (photograph 2)



Practical work at the ICT laboratory (Photograph 3)

13. Challenges

In spite of the success story of the school, a myriad of problems confronts it. Foremost among them are inadequate number of residential facilities for staff, inadequate dormitory facilities large student population, lack of well-equipped science laboratory, and inadequate reading materials at the library and the difficulty in collecting school fees from parents due to general economic difficulties. These challenges are admittedly not peculiar to ADGISS; they face all second cycle institutions in the country but it is believed that all major stakeholders would continue to pull resources together to surmount them for great ADGISS to live long to play its expected role in the national development programme.

14. Conclusion

The “journey” of ASTECH which became ADGISS, though not too long has rather been circuitous. But there was clear indication that the effective role of leadership in the evolution of the School has been tremendous. From its inception, during the time of *the inspirational trio* to the time of the appointment of as the pioneer Headmaster, Odomse Akuoko Nyantakyi as the headmaster and the intervention of the King of the Ashanti Kingdom to end the protracted land dispute as well as the conversion of the School to a female institution under the leadership of Ms. Paulina Agyekum, one can say that leadership both human and divine has been largely responsible for the steady growth of the School. Experiences in the School have sometimes been harrowing but whatever interpretations that would be given to the above historical reconstruction, the SDA church which founded the School believes that all the happenings in the School were inspired by God, the sovereign ruler of the universe, to teach it unforgettable lessons in life that our first duty is to recognize him as the Lord of all and to use our rational powers to build consensus and not to allow emotions, prejudices and partisanship to take the better part of us in the course of building a better future for our youth (Oral interview with elder Peter Boakye on 27th February, 2016). Undoubtedly, ADGISS has made giant strides, in providing quality female education, by the collective sacrifice and commitment of many; right from those who mooted the idea to those who sustained the “good fight”. Whilst maintaining it to reach its loftiest height, let the Church, the Ntonso community and the government not remain complacent but dream big again and give mother Ghana another pie which is even sweeter.

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- Oral Interview with elder Adomako Mensah on 6th March, 2016 at Ntonso- Ashanti