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PILGRIM SITES IN THE METHODIST CHURCH GHANA AND THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITAS

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Abstract. The focus of this paper, the impact of the institutionalized pilgrimages of the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG), reckoned as a “Communitas” experience, affords Church Members an avenue for diverse religious experiences. Focus group discussions, interviews and participant observation were used to collect primary data from 134 respondents. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that visitors at the pilgrim sites experience healing, transformation and bonding, among other things. The communitas experiences have far reaching effects, but there is a need for education on the Church’s accepted practices at the pilgrim sites.

Keywords: communitas, renewal, pilgrim sites, Methodist Church Ghana.

Streszczenie. Miejsca pielgrzymkowe w Kościele Metodystycznym w Ghanie i koncepcja communitas. Tematem artykułu jest wpływ zinstytucjonalizowanych pielgrzymek organizowanych przez Kościół Metodystyczny w Ghanie (MCG), które są postrzegane w kategoriach doświadczenia *communitas* i stwarzają wiernym okazję do doznawania całej gamy przeżyć religijnych. Dzięki zogniskowanym wywiadam grupowym, wywiadam bezpośrednim i obserwacji uczestników pozyskano dane pierwotne od 134 respondentów, które następnie poddano analizie tematycznej. Poczynione ustalenia wskazują, że osoby odwiedzające miejsca pielgrzymkowe doznają między innymi uzdrowienia i przemiany oraz tworzą wzajemne więzi. Doświadczenie *communitas* ma dalekoosiężne skutki, ale konieczna jest edukacja na temat praktyk, jakie Kościół dopuszcza w miejscach pielgrzymkowych.

Słowa kluczowe: *Communitas*, odnowienie, miejsca pielgrzymkowe, Kościół Metodystyczny w Ghanie.

INTRODUCTION

The Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) has over the years organized camp meetings to maintain the spiritual barometer of its members. The camps are avenues for *Communitas* experience. People with various forms of diseases seek healing, and those believed to be under spiritual bondage receive their deliverance. The MCG endorses institutionalized pilgrimages to church-owned prayer centres referred variously as pilgrim sites and sacred sites. The phenomenon has crystallized the renewal activities of the MCG. There is the perception that the practices at the prayer centres create vital openings for corporate revivals and growth.

The larger context of this paper: “Sacred Site Visitation and the Renewal Programme of the Methodist Church Ghana”,¹ sought primarily, to analyze the various perceptions about Sacred Site Visitation (SSV), namely; the justification for it being a measure for people, especially the clergy’s spiritual development, the MCG’s authoritative stance on the interconnectedness of the SSV phenomenon with the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP), and how all of that feed into the growth system of the church.

The Methodist Renewal Programme with its revival activities in the Church aims at promoting spiritual transformation and holistic development. It operates under the auspices of the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Advisory Team. The term ‘Institutionalized Pilgrimages’ refers to journeys organized to certain significant sacred sites.² Hierophanies are said to alter ordinary sites into highly potent spaces, believed to be im-

¹ Doris Ekua Yalley, “Sacred Site Visitation and the Renewal, Programme of the Methodist Church Ghana”, (PhD Thesis, University of Ghana, 2015).

² Victor Turner, “The Center out There: Pilgrim’s Goal,” *History of Religions* 12, no. 3 (1973): 191–230. See also: Harold Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (Walter de Gruyter, 1979); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, vol. 81 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959).

bued with supernatural powers.³ These spaces, be it shrines, temples, altars, among others, are considered highly sacred by most religious practitioners, not only Christians.⁴ They are also highly significant than the worship centres or normal church auditoriums where people regularly visit from very short distances.⁵

This study is carried out to find out how sacred sites are influencing church members' spirituality and behaviour. It will help the MCG to strategize on ways to promote the spiritual and material benefits derived from SSV. Academically, the findings will provide indices for further pilgrim sites studies.

Three prayer centres ran by the MCG were selected as case studies: the William de-Graft Memorial Centre (WdGC) at Azani in the Sekondi Diocese of the Western Region, the Thomas Birch Freeman Memorial Centre (TBFC) at Adansi Kusa in the Obuasi Diocese of the Ashanti Region and the Abasua Prayer Centre (APC) in the Effiduase Diocese of the Ashanti Region. These sites were selected based on the high regard accorded them by the church, the local communities and in the case of APC, its international appeal.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – THEORY OF *COMMUNITAS*

Turner's theory of *communitas* is brought to bear in the data analysis to drive home the sense of filial love, renewal, healing, and transformation among sacred site visitors, however brief or long-term that may be. *Communitas* is the experience of being removed from society to experience a new kind of social relationship that exists in all kinds of soci-

³ Peter Jan Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages in the Modern World. New Itineraries into the Sacred* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008): 42.

⁴ Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred* (Los Angeles, CA – London: University of California Press, 2005), 146. Augustine is cited as having clearly accepted as real the miracles associated with a martyr's tomb. He declared according to Bitton-Ashkelony: "although «the (power of the) dust is hidden,» the merciful gifts bestowed through it are manifest." A long list of such miracles according to Bitton-Ashkelony appears in the last section of the *City of God* (22.8). Especially notable are those occurring through the relics of Stephen, transferred from Palestine.

⁵ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, 27–28.

ety, and which is not reducible to the community. Turner categorizes the experience of the pilgrimage into three stages-separation, liminality, and re-aggregation.⁶

The first stage is the state of separation represented by the detachment of the individual, or group, from an earlier fixed point in the social structure and everyday life.⁷ This is demonstrated by the removal of interested members of MCG from their homes, jobs, and everyday social life to travel and gather at a specific sacred site. The second stage which is the state of liminality is where the pilgrim goes through a realm with none of the characteristics associated with his or her past state of life. This state is seen as anti-structural and anti-hierarchical.⁸ The second stage takes place at the sacred site where the participant or the pilgrim undergoes a spiritual renewal as he or she participates in all the activities or encounters the sacred. This stage is also associated with miraculous healings or a personal transformation.⁹ It is also at this stage that *Communitas* occur among fellow pilgrims as they are detached from their routine daily lives.¹⁰ The third phase is the reintegration state. It marks the end of the sacred journey. The pilgrim reconnects with the larger society again but this time in a transformed state. Thus, the vital elements in Turner's theory for this research are *identity construction, transformation of healing and renewal*.¹¹ In the process of bonding at the sacred centre, the self is denied, and the individual finds himself or herself overwhelmed by the group consciousness. The question of identity construction in this community life is essential. Yet even within this group space, the MCG is able to "create space for individuals to retreat and commune with God".¹² Although Turner's application of *Communitas* to pilgrimages have received

⁶ Robin Stanford, "The Pilgrim Corps Vivant: Closing the Gap Between Foundational Typologies and Non-Locative Pilgrimage Practices—Die Sionpilger by Felix Fabri as Case Study" (PhD Thesis, Concordia University, 2019).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*.

⁹ ¹⁵ Albera Dionigi and John Eade, "International Perspectives on Pilgrimage Studies: Putting the Anglophone Contribution in Its Place," *Routledge* (2015): 13–34.

¹⁰ Stanford, *The Pilgrim Corps Vivant*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "A former Director of EMR, Interview Granted the Researcher, February 2, 2014".

heavy criticisms,¹³ it provides the best framework for this research in understanding the ramifications of institutionalized pilgrimages, namely, image construction, renewal, love, and harmony.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. DESIGN AND FRAMEWORK

A qualitative study using a case study research approach was used, as shown in the major thesis – SSV and The Renewal Program of the MCG. Primary data on the practice of SSV within the MCG was gathered through participant observation, structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD). These data gathering approaches allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive picture of the subject matter at hand, as well as elicit additional thoughts and opinions from respondents in order to investigate new avenues that had not previously been examined. The Church's lay and clergy members were the major sources of information. Historical archives, published papers, and other databases were also used to gather secondary data. Before they began working with the data, all of the participants gave their consent.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION

Appointments with the bishops, directors, and caretakers of the study locations were established in advance to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Before and throughout the categorization, coding, and interpretation processes, phone calls were made to particular respondents for follow-up questions and general explanations. During the interviews, participants' values, experiences, and perspectives on the research topic were acquired in-depth and collectively. The focus group participants were given the opportunity to share their own personal experiences. In addition, appropriate settings were chosen for interviews and focus

¹³ Albera and Eade, "International Perspectives" (Routledge, 2015): 13–34.

groups, such as a semi-circle seating pattern. With the exception of key Methodist Church informants whose views were of substantial relevance to the entire Church, participants were assured anonymity regarding the information they supplied.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Theory-driven themes were generated and supported by data-driven codes. Analysis of the study findings and data management followed Michael Downey's Appropriate Method for inter-disciplinary research.¹⁴

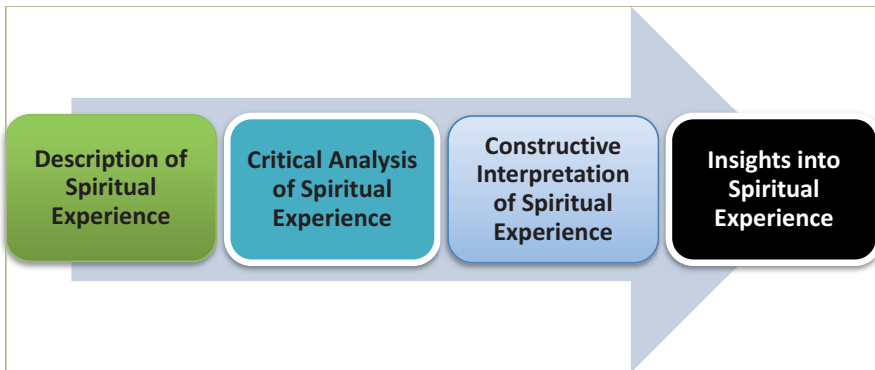


Figure 1. Analytical Framework

Source: Adapted from Michael Downey's *Analytical Method for Studying Christian Spirituality*.

Downey's three-step method begins with a report of a spiritual experience, followed by critical analysis and constructive interpretation. To begin with, Downey believes that a vivid depiction of spiritual experience can bring insight into the faith and ritual practices that believers learn as they grow spiritually. Codes were created from the responses. Second, Downey claims that critical analysis allows the researcher to get insight into the settings that underpin spiritual experiences. For example, rather

¹⁴ Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1997), 126–129.

than seeing “prolonged fasts” as an ascetic practice, a more balanced perspective may analyze it in connection to aspects such as faith maturity, communal commitment, and so on. Downey believes that in order to do so effectively, the researcher needs to be familiar with modern investigative techniques.

2.4. POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

‘Population’ in this paper is the selected respondents in the study area which included members of the MCG and the indigenous communities at the prayer centres. The MCG population comprised the high-ranking clergy and the laity. The indigenous community population comprised caretakers of the church’s prayer centres and selected community members. Participants in the various categories were purposively sampled, with few that were reached using the snowball approach. Table 1 shows a summary of sampled participants and the method used to collect the data.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents and data collection method

Category of respondents	Number of respondents	Data collection method
GHAMSU Executive Officers	13	FGD
Trinity College	7	FGD
Senior Clergy	11	Interview
Church members at the prayer sites	60	Interview
A cross-section of Churches in Accra	35	Interview
Indigenes and chiefs from 2 towns of the prayer sites*	15	Interview
Caretakers	4	Interview

*None engaged at APC.

3. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This section begins by exploring, respondent perception of what sacred site is. It further seeks to find out individual experiences at sacred site visitations, ritual activities that take place at the sacred sites as well as the kind of transformation (renewal) that pilgrims experience as a result of their visits. The first of these themes was ceremonial ritual (transitional phase) which addresses some specific rites that pilgrims undergo at sacred sites, that results in them leaving behind an old identity, and becoming something new.¹⁵ This was followed by the impact of such ceremonial rituals on pilgrims, including a sense of belonging, love, and a new mindset towards the things of God (*communitas*).

3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED PILGRIMAGE

A careful analysis of responses given by the participants in the study yielded several views to merit the understanding of the prayer centres as sacred sites. The study posed the question as to what sacred sites were to the Christian, or at least, to the Methodist Church Ghana. The insight given by the clergy depict a metaphysical understanding of the term sacred site. A bishop, for example, stated that:

From an academic perspective, sacred sites can be regarded as objects and places which are used by God to manifest his power and presence and from the religious perspective sacred sites can be a chapel where people go to worship.¹⁶

In line with the exposition above, four (4) members of the clergy showed that the presence of God at sacred sites is a significant factor that cannot be glossed over. Their statements indicate:

A solitary place where one can engage in a serious communion with God.¹⁷

¹⁵ Turner, "The Center out There".

¹⁶ A senior most clergy, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

¹⁷ A supernumerary, interview granted the researcher, August 21, 2014.

Any place where the divine presence of God can be encountered.¹⁸

Places that serve as a source of inspiration and add to knowledge acquisition.¹⁹

Places of inspiration and further commitment in faith.²⁰

The third and fourth views above presuppose the existence of a place beyond the natural as exemplified by Balandier.²¹ From the third statement, for example, a place that is to serve as a source of inspiration and knowledge suggests that these virtues are diffused from this higher place onto individuals. Clearly, the supernatural dimension which is widely attributed to ‘God’ is implied in this thinking.²²

3.2. CEREMONIAL RITUALS

During their participation in the institutional pilgrimages, all 60 respondents who had visited the sacred locations acknowledged that they felt strongly distanced from their normal lives. Fasting, prayer, (nailing one’s enemies, hurling stones, collecting sand – these were not especially approved by the Church leadership), reading the bible, meditation, and other ceremonial activities are all practiced at the location. Many pilgrims reported to a “slightly” newer version of themselves on these structured pilgrimages. Moving from spiritual weakness to spiritual strength, a sense of fulfillment, healing, deliverance, and advancement in knowledge and spiritual experience are all examples of the new identity. As a result, one pilgrim opined:

Coming to places like this is the best way to revive ourselves, because everything about the place, fasting and prayer, harsh weather conditions, in-

¹⁸ A sitting bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 22, 2013.

¹⁹ A former bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 15, 2013.

²⁰ The sitting Bishop of Accra, interview granted the researcher, February 22, 2013.

²¹ Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

²² John James, “Significance in Sacred Sites: The Churches around Positano,” *Annals of Science*, 35 (1978), 18, 27.

adequate living accommodation, etc. contributes to our spiritual growth. You decide to leave your comfort zone and wrestle with God. For instance, when you climb Abasua Mountain and come and sleep on the bare floor in the cold and you decide that you will not seek God's face and be serious, then I will say its sheer craziness.²³

A solitary place where one can withdraw from the hustle and bustle of everyday life for a time alone with God.²⁴

It is a serene environment that promotes deep concentration and reflection among others, where one denies oneself of luxuries.²⁵

It is a place for separation of oneself. Gifted persons found such places, so God's power is there.²⁶

Also, exorcism or deliverance from witchcraft at the sites can be classified as a form of specific ceremonial rites that pilgrims who visit sacred sites undergo, which in a way transform them into a new version of themselves. The comment that follows, for example, expresses some level of disillusionment with the way activities are carried out at the prayer sites:

The whole idea of praying at the sites is not wrong but the 'witch hunting', healing and deliverance overshadow the whole program.²⁷

A significant issue that emerged from the responses was the practice of taking home memorabilia (i.e., organic, and inorganic substances) from prayer sites for different uses. Members of the laity particularly had this to say:

I take the sand because this place is a holy ground.²⁸

²³ Respondent 2, FGD with the Researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁴ Respondent 13, FGD with the Researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁵ Respondent 57, FGD with the Researcher at Abasua, August 7, 2012.

²⁶ Respondent 16, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 3, 2011.

²⁷ Supernumerary, personal conversation with the researcher, February 15, 2013.

²⁸ Respondent 3, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, December 12, 2012.

I take the sand and go and sprinkle it in my store. It will always remind me of the powers of the place.²⁹

Feedback from one of the caretakers of the sites suggests a common belief that the organic or inorganic memorabilia at the sites possess some power to cause some spiritual transformation in the life of the pilgrim. At the *Thomas Birch Freeman Memorial Centre* (TBFC), the caretaker recounted:

Over the years, people have used the mango plants here in Freeman, its bark, and leaves. Also, water from the well here because they believe that having been used by the white man, T. B. Freeman, there is potency in them.³⁰

A lot of people believe that the mango leaves cure infertility and this works for them.³¹

These views not only give strength to the idea that the prayer sites are holy grounds but also portray the realities in terms of practices at sacred sites. A caretaker specifically asserted that he has continually cured visitors' illnesses with some organic matter from the site, including curing cancer:

Curing breast cancer with the bark of the mango tree is my specialty at this centre.³²

Other members of the laity from the prayer centres had strong convictions that the practices at the prayer sites are purely a matter of faith. That is, whatever one does at these prayer centres is in accordance with the faith of the individual. Thus, according to their faith, there are varied ways in which different people would approach practices at the prayer

²⁹ Respondent 9, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 12, 2013.

³⁰ Caretaker 1 at the Thomas Birch Freeman Memorial Centre, 2013.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Respondent 95 (a caretaker of one of the sites), interview granted the researcher, February 16, 2013.

sites. The other significant practices obtained from members of the laity at the prayer sites reflect this:

People have faith that when they take the sand or leaves from Abasua and they are in need of anything, they can pray to it for answers.³³

I believe it is in one's faith that makes things work for them.³⁴

I normally take the anointing oil because evangelists have prayed on it.³⁵

Apart from the belief that corporate journeys to these pilgrim sites promote prayer life of members and make them strong, it is instructive to point out that people flock to prayer centers in a quest for answers to their difficulties. Individual difficulties in life are usually included in the problems. This becomes difficult to relate the pilgrim sites' activities to the Church's doctrine of renewal.

3.3. PILGRIMS' TRANSFORMATION

How institutionalized pilgrimage relates to members renewal is a primary question raised in this study. Renewal denotes advancement of an individual's religious state. Renewal is focused on the person and his connection with God, and it results in a good change. Respondents who participate in a ritual activity at a sacred place not only feel detached from their daily routines, but they also picture themselves going through a transformative phase. They are transformed from their former states (after specific rites in the camp). Respondents frequently referred to this phenomenon as renewal. Some responders summed it up like:

Individual renewal is there, like when you are on your own and you fast and pray. Group renewal is the type we experience at Abasua for instance.

³³ Respondent 103, Focus Group Discussion with the Researcher, Abasua, 2013.

³⁴ Respondent 107, focus group discussion with the researcher, Azani, December 31, 2013.

³⁵ Respondent 76, focus group discussion with the researcher, Azani, December 31, 2013.

There were many people who believed that going on a pilgrimage or visiting a prayer center was crucial for personal development. The significance of these perspectives is that the location encourages fasting and prayer, a shift away from one's own comfort zone and toward God in order to tackle actual difficulties. What was mentioned by a layperson, as already cited above under Ceremonial Rituals, reflects a number of different points of views that were gathered that:

Coming to places like this is the best way to revive ourselves, because everything about the place, fasting and prayer, harsh weather conditions, inadequate living accommodation, etc. contributes to our spiritual growth. You decide to leave your comfort zone and wrestle with God. For instance, when you climb Abasua Mountain and come and sleep on the bare floor in the cold and you decide that you will not seek God's face and be serious, then I will say its sheer craziness.³⁶

Another issue raised was the fact that the collective participation in the pilgrimage brings the realization of what is said in the dictum, "iron sharpens iron". According to a member of the laity:

Coming together as a Church and doing things together challenge those who are weak to renew their prayer life.³⁷

From the foregoing, renewal – i.e., the *transformation of the pilgrim* – is accessed through fasting and prayers, wrestling with God, evolving a strong prayer life, and seeking solutions to life's hardships. However, a contrary view from one of the youth in GHAMSU shows that there are some who do not think this kind of pilgrimage is the way to seek renewal (transformation into new self), at least not the only way. This view was presented this way:

As for me, I do not think visiting places like this is the only source of renewal. And of course, people should not wait to get to a prayer site before they can seek renewal. Praying and fasting alone in one's home can also

³⁶ Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher, MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

³⁷ Respondent 2, Methodist Pastoral Student, FGD with the researcher at Trinity Theological Seminary (TTS), May 30, 2013.

bring renewal. Jesus advocated the latter even though his lifestyle suggested the former. Well, it is a matter of choice.³⁸

Hence, travelling outside one's normal geographical circles, and to a place as conducive as Abasua, prepares one to receive more from God if only with a ready and willing heart. Sometimes there is the need to observe silence at these places. In the writings of J.N. Ward, silence is a *sine qua non in retreats*:

When people are persuaded to leave the environment of life and go some distance into a completely new spiritual situation (especially if it is in beautiful surroundings where there is a tradition of community prayer) they find that they are able to receive in this isolation and concentration much more of God than they apparently receive in their familiar pattern of regular weekly meetings of worship or instruction in the life of the local Church. It is more likely that this more concentrated and prepared method of spiritual rehabilitation is going to replace some of the traditional weekly programmes of the average Church.³⁹

Above all, such retreats will be fruitful when people who embark on such spiritual exercises get actively involved personally in the spiritual activities planned out for the group. Most times, the time allowed for 'alone with God' is conversation time for many. But this is a crucial part of the renewal activities as they run through the mandated programmes at the various centres.

4. IMPACT OF THE CEREMONIAL RITES/ PRACTICES AT THE PRAYER CENTRES

Individual members are found to move from their respective homes into the sacred sites during the performance of the above-mentioned activities, and in doing so, they not only feel removed from their normal

³⁸ Respondent 77, Methodist Pastoral Student, FGD with the researcher at TTS Campus, May 30, 2013.

³⁹ John Neville Ward, "The Use of Praying." *London: Epworth*, 1967, 125, 127.

routine lifestyles, but also their social statuses are dissolved as they share common experiences. Pilgrims participate in a variety of ceremonial rituals as a group. The entire experience in the sacred space may now be regarded as a rite of passage, in which the individual is transformed via numerous acts.

4.1. SENSE OF BELONGING

The purpose for starting the pilgrimage practice can be said to create basically a corporate identity. Further, it can be seen as a platform for churches to outline very attractive programmes that people can participate in, especially where church growth and soul-winning have become a very serious and almost competitive issue in Ghana. In a sense, the pilgrimage is purposely an evangelism campaign that is meant to bring together all and sundry to maintain the growth of the Church. The response below given by a respondent, affirms this idea:

The MCG adopted this practice for Ecumenical reasons. Whilst other Churches visited pilgrimage sites, the Methodist Church could not stand aloof and pretend that nothing was happening. More importantly, it was meant to stem the possible drift of membership of the Methodist Church to other Churches that organized such visits.⁴⁰

The interesting thing is as one goes through the various activities designed at the prayer camp, one will come home renewed, full of vigour with spiritual power to do more for God.

The comment from another member of the clergy, a Director of the EMRAT programme also reiterated that the original arrangement of moving to Abasua, one of the Methodist Church prayer sites, was to pray for the evangelism programme of the Church, hence, it was to be regarded as the prayer tower for evangelism. In plain words, the respondent said:

The whole programme of moving to Abasua was to serve as a prayer tower for evangelism. When the idea came up to pray, the presiding bishop was

⁴⁰ Former 1st Clergy, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

even happy. We all thought this will promote evangelism in the Church, but now we see people go there to seek answers for their own needs.⁴¹

A major question posed in this study is how the practice of SSV or pilgrimage relates to the renewal programme and the growth of the MCG. Renewal of the Church is taken to mean a discipleship drive of the Church for the transformation of society. This idea of transformation of the larger society and the growth of the Church is encapsulated in the vision of the MCG.

4.2. COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Respondents also expressed their sense of community spirit as they participated in various rituals at sacred sites collectively with other people. It was revealed that after visiting sacred sites members are renewed with a deep sense of community spirit towards their church and are found to be more willing to do more for their societies. This is captured in the words of a respondent.

Anytime I visited the prayer camp and participated in various rites with my fellow Believers, I had this strong sense of belonging, like having a family that standing with you in your challenges and it's a great feeling.⁴²

When you come with any problem and you get the support of the entire Church, answers are prompt.⁴³

We do not always have to climb up and pray for ourselves. I think we can even collect used clothes from amongst ourselves and distribute them to people in the surrounding villages.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Former director of EMR, interview granted the researcher, March 25, 2013.

⁴² Respondent 20, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 31, 2013.

⁴³ Respondent 20, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2013.

⁴⁴ Respondent 43, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2012.

People pray with dynamism. Obviously, this will be carried over to their respective churches.⁴⁵

When people have answers to their personal needs it makes them committed to the Church.⁴⁶

Spirituality cannot be measured nor quantified. But there is always the enthusiastic and zealous approach to worship after such trips and many evangelists attest to this.⁴⁷

4.3. FULFILMENT

Other members interviewed expressed a deep sense of fulfilment in themselves as they collectively engaged in the activities they were required to perform during their visits to the sacred sites. Another lay member at Abasua indicated that apart from the prayers, members have been engaged in discussions during Bible studies and other teachings. This view is in line with the vision of the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Program (MPRP):

As for me since the beginning of the programme, I have never missed a visit. I see that each year the emphasis changes. In the past, we had talks and prayed. This time we do teachings and Bible studies. So, to me, this fulfils the MPRP vision.⁴⁸

I go to the prayer camp with burden and often leave the place fulfilled. One leaves the place with joy and some form of good feeling knowing that one's request is heard and will take place.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ A former Bishop, interview with the researcher, February 22, 2013.

⁴⁶ A Bishop, interview with the researcher, Methodist Headquarters Accra, August 24, 2014.

⁴⁷ Director of EMR, telephone conversation with the researcher, February 02, 2014.

⁴⁸ Respondent 63 (Evangelist male, 40 years), personal conversation with the researcher, Abasua, February 25, 2012.

⁴⁹ Respondent 101, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2013.

Another issue raised was the fact that the collective participation in the pilgrimage brings the realization of what is said in the dictum, “iron sharpens iron”. According to a member of the laity:

Coming together as a Church and doing things together challenge those who are weak to renew their prayer life.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

The MCG members’ different opinions on organized pilgrimages and the ensuing transformation it brings to their lives were explored in this study. So far, the investigation has offered useful insights into how members of the church have institutionalized pilgrimage and renewal. There have been some voiced reservations about how the conduct of ceremonial rites at sacred locations affects the change of persons and society, which the Church leadership must address through more education. Even while spiritual enlightenment proceeds from renewal, just visiting hallowed locations does not ensure genuine renewal. Church members have been known to visit sacred locations in the hope of receiving some interventions for their existential concerns. The psychological and emotional balance that come with answered prayers rather become the source of transformation for most people. And within that same context, the sense of *communitas* also evolves.

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⁵⁰ Respondent 2, Methodist Pastoral Student, FGD with the researcher at TTS, May 30, 2013.

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