

**BAPTIST WOMEN'S MISSIONARY UNION OF NIGERIA: YESTERDAY
AND TODAY'S KINGDOM HELPERS IN HUMAN CAPACITY BUILDING T
HROUGH EVANGELISM AND STEWARDSHIP.**

A PAPER PRESENTED

BY

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EKO HOTEL, LAGOS.

Dear people of God, I am most grateful to the Leadership of Baptist World Alliance for inviting me to this epoch making event to present a Paper on the History of Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria. This is a great privilege and I am not taking it for granted. I am equally grateful to the President of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, Rev. Dr. Israel Akanji and my amiable Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Mrs. Rachel Adepate Lateju for this honour.

Introduction:

The Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria is an Auxiliary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Article X of the NBC's Constitution page 16 says: 'The Women's Missionary Union shall be an auxiliary to the Convention. It shall have the responsibility of harnessing resources from the WMU groups of Churches, Associations and Conferences for Missionary work locally and Nationally. It cooperates with the Convention and enjoys the autonomy of drawing up her own programmed and activities...'

It is expedient to start with this for us to understand the premium placed on this Organization in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The History of BWMU of Nigeria is so wide and enormous that the presenter decided to limit her paper on BWMU as Kingdom Helpers in Human Capacity Building through Evangelism and Stewardship. Since its establishment in 1919, Evangelism and Stewardship have been the focus of BWMU. The Watch word of the Union is "For we are labourers together with God, ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's Building"(1Cor 3:9). How amazing that we are Fellow workers with God! We are under His employment. We are His employees. Therefore, we are under obligation to do as He tells us in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations..." The Proclamation of the Gospel is the Central task of the Church. The Founding Mothers of the Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria captured this commission early enough and decided to be part of God's work force in His Vineyard to build the people through Evangelism and Stewardship. God has always used women in the old and new testaments! Zimmerman in Ayegboyin (1996) comments "In virtually all cases, women have had to de

monstrate their dedication and calling to a greater extent than men" A beautiful compliment for the women folk!

In this paper, the presenter will briefly trace the History of BWMU of Nigeria since its inception in 1919 to this present dispensation (2024) in the area of Evangelism and Stewardship and the impact on human capacity building. Oyerinde(1938) recognizes the enormous work of BWMU of Nigeria and asserts: " far flung influence of the Women's organizing ability, penetrating business sense and unflagging spiritual fervour is being felt in the churches as well as in the homes and schools".

The role of BWMU of Nigeria in Human Capacity Building through Evangelism and Stewardship will be discussed under the following sub-headings:

-Key Words

-How the Union began

-Purposes;

-Methods of Operation;

-Baptist Women's Missionary Union Yesterday and Human Capacity Building through Evangelism and Stewardship;

-Today's BWMU of Nigeria and Human Capacity Building through Evangelism and **Stewardship**;

-**Conclusion.**

Key Words:

Evangelism: This refers to the spreading of the Christian Gospel either by personal or public witnessing. It is the act of preaching the Good news with the intention of winning souls for Christ through the working power of the Holy Spirit. (Mathew 28:18-20).

Stewardship:

This implies the act of recognizing that everything we have and what we are, are gifts from God, being grateful to Him and being generous with these gifts. In other words, it is the act of using what God has endowed us with to bless others.

Human Capacity Building:

This is the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that individuals, organizations and communities need to succeed, survive, adapt to and thrive in a fast changing world like Nigeria.

Kingdom Helpers:

In God's Kingdom, every day, someone gives and some receives. So people with the mind set of providing God's services to their fellow human beings materially, spiritually, mentally, financially and socially are Kingdom Helpers. It is a non-profit outreach ministry.

Purposes:

The Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria exists for missions. Initially, the main purpose was to invite and enlist women into the local churches, mould them to be better housewives, godly mothers and models in the Churches and the Community in the fear of God. This vision has now extended to include intensive Evangelism, prayers, giving, support for training and empowering women and girls for Kingdom growth, assisting women for Christian Leadership and mentoring young girls. It is now designed to win all women groups for discipleship and establish them in Baptist Churches and operating by examples. Another purpose is to assist and cooperate with the Global Mission Board in church planting, help in sustaining the local and International Mission Fields.

Methods of Operation:

In order to achieve the purposes for establishing BWMU of Nigeria, the following strategies are being used:

-Division of the Members into Organizations, Fundamentals and Zones.

The WMU comprises four organizations according to age brackets:

a. Sunbeam Band for children between ages 4 and 9 years. This band provides early Chri

Christian education for the boys and girls in missions. Through this Organisation, thousands of children have giving their lives to Christ. Their activities include Bible memory drills, Day Camp, Mission Study. It is as old as WMU itself;

b. Girl's Auxiliary :

This is for girls between ages 5 to 17 years. It was started by Mrs Carson, a female Southern Baptist Convention Missionary in 1922. The main programme as at then was to act Bible Stories. Today, the organization engages in missions, prayers, Evangelism Stewardship and intensifies in producing godly girls and future leaders for our Convention. The Watchword is taken from Isaiah 60:1.

c. Lydia Auxiliary:

Girls from 18 years and above until marriage belong to this division. It was started in 1946 under the leadership of Mrs Rebecca Taiwo. The Watchword is taken from Acts 26: 18a. It also exists for missions. Emphasis is on godly Christian living, chastity, Bible reading, prayers, going on visits to Mission Field, training them in the act of soul winning and building them to become eligible members of Women's Missionary Society after marriage;

d. Women's Missionary Society:

It is for all Baptist married women of all ages and the widowed. It is as old as Women's Missionary Union. The main work of this society is enormous. It empowers every woman Kingdom Growth through Bible study and prayers, evangelism, stewardship and service, impacting Christian Leadership qualities on members with a view to influencing their homes, churches, places of work and the society at large. They also finance, support and mentor the young people's Organisations (Sunbeam, G.A. and Lydia) ;

The Fundamentals: There are four of them:

-Prayers: There, are National, Conference, Associational, and church Chairmen. The National Chairman and her Committee plan and organise prayers, deliverance and Retreats.

These include Rebecca's for girls waiting on the Lord for future life partners; Hannah's for those waiting on the Lord for children ; Widow's for those whose husbands have passed on to glory; Executive Women's for all categories of women and Couple for the married. The women converge to pray, intercede and discuss about issues pertaining to education, health, politics, marriage, unemployment, all forms of Abuse, insecurity, youth restiveness, and Government's insensitivity about the state of our nation and brainstorm on how to resolve such. There is also a group known as Daughters of Zion saddled with the role of prayers, counselling and Deliverance for the emotionally disturbed and spiritually oppressed;

Evangelism and Missions:

This fundamental engages in training, preaching, witnessing, giving, enlisting and winning souls for Christ. This is accomplished through personal, public corporate, school, village, bus, prison and open air crusade during camp meetings, Association, Conference and Convention as well as during Leadership Workshops. They engage in planting churches, building church auditorium and assisting the Global Mission Board financially in sustaining the International and local Mission Fields. The Chairman for each conference reports to the National Chairman .Notable among these that have served are DNS. Agnes Ofugara and Rev. Dr. Mrs Abigail Ajoke Jasper who became the first Director for Evangelism and Missions;

-Bible and Mission Study:

It all began in 1925 and the first Chairman was Miss Ethel Guest. This Fundamental encourages members in reading the Bible through the year, engaging in Bible quiz competitions and giving out bibles to converts;

-Stewardship and Service:

Women engage in giving, organising lectures, visiting leprosy centres, the sick in hospitals, widows, the elderly, helping the needy spiritually, physically, materially, financially and ministering to those in prison, remand homes and the physically challenged;

-Zones:

The BWMU, in order to reach out to more women divided the 34 Conferences in the Convention into three Zones which include the Eastern, Western and Northern Zones. The Executive Director, National, President, Treasurer BWMU Staff, Directors and the National Chairmen of the Fundamentals periodically visit and organize workshops for each of the Zones;

-Publications:

The BWMU of Nigeria produces and publishes Literatures for the different departments annually. These include manuals for the young people, programmes for the observance of annual activities, periodicals, magazines such as the Proclaim, the Seal, Association programmes, prayer and Prayer plans, WMU Yearbook and a host of others. The present Editor is Mrs Oyindamola Alabi. These works are written by WMU members who were trained through WMU Writers' Workshop.

-Giving ; Another major method employed by BWMU in Human Capacity Building is in the area of Giving. The National Treasurer plans, budgets and allocates amount of money to be paid by each of the Conferences. These in turn breaks it down to the Associations and then to the churches. Donations from individuals and groups, offerings, seed faith and profits from sales publications as well as materials are the sources of income;

-International Conferences:

BWMU belongs to different bodies such as the Baptist World Alliance, Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Africa, Women's Missionary Union of West Africa, Christian Association of Nigeria and All African Baptist Fellowship to name a few. Our Women are encouraged to attend Conferences organised by these bodies within and outside Nigeria making them to be more knowledgeable about people of other nations and their peculiar challenges;

Other strategies employed by BWMU to promote its work in Human Capacity Building in

clude Drama presentations, Symposium, Competitions such as in music, March Past, Dancing, Fashion Parade and Quiz. Other methods are Teaching, Seminars, Scholarship, Sponsorship and Health Care Services during crusades and meetings.

More innovation are coming up making BWMU to be in the forefront in Human Capacity Building.

How Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria Began:

The History of this Union dates back to the years when the Baptist Mission came into Nigeria between 1854-1919. The Union started as a seed planted by Dr. and Mrs. Mobolaji Agbebi with the desire to have a league for men and women. By 1916, the Lagos Women's League held their meeting. Mrs. S. G. Pinnock suggested that each church should have its own League. Women's Leagues continued to thrive in churches until the 14th of March, 1919 when it metamorphosed into Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria under the Leadership of E. G. Mcleans at Ogbomoso who presided over that inaugural meeting. Mama Adeotan Agbebi was then elected as the WMU President in absentia as she could not attend due to ill-health. That first Meeting was held under an "Idin-ishi" (ackee Apple) tree. Since then many other Nigerians too numerous to mention have been Presidents and officers of the Union. These were mentored by various Southern Baptist Convention female Missionaries. Some of them include Miss Susan Anderson, Neal C. Young, Mrs. Grace Carson, Anita Roper, Mrs. Patterson, and Miss Mary Ellen Yancey.

In her book titled "Their Legacy: WMU of Nigeria, Volume 111", Aduke Akinola, a one time WMU of Nigeria Executive Director gave a Chronicle of the works of pioneer Nigerian WMU women. Some of them include Mrs. Johannah Mobola Ayorinde, Mrs. Grace Ajani, Dns. Rachael Boluwade, Mrs. Ruth Asati Fagbohun, Dns. Beatrice Otolorin, Dns. R.B. Famuyiwa and Mrs. Grace Sagie. These basically worked with the women, girls and children to become self-reliant, self-sufficient, emotionally, mentally and spiritually matured.

These achievements came to be through vigorous evangelism and stewardship activities with no financial support from the churches. The work of WMU was done through the

women's personal sacrifice, commitment, their love and zeal for God under very difficult conditions. Transportation to the hinterland and the villages was a herculean task because there were very few vehicles. The roads were very bad and at times it took these wonderful women days to get to their destinations. Hostility of the people preached to and ill-health suffered by these women also made the task difficult. However, through the resiliency of these women, they were able to reach out to many women, girls and children and won them for Christ. These converts were taught the tactics of becoming potential housewives to pastors, teachers and civil servants.

There was population increase in the churches as a result of the efforts of the women. The women also assisted the churches financially. By 1975, the percentage of women outnumbered those of the men. This was hinged on the methods applied by the women in inviting the unlisted women and girls to their Fellowship, Retreats, Associational and Camp meetings.

Lateju (2019) asserts that WMU is a Helper to the Nigerian Baptist Convention since the women being nurtured are Helpers in the homes where their support and encouragement brought about progress to the convention. Indeed, Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria has contributed a lot to the Mission efforts of the NBC through their involvement in spreading the Gospel and winning souls for Christ. According to Akinola (2002) these pioneer women laboured at a time when culture did not permit women any role in the church except to listen and obey without questions. However, through perseverance their work became successful.

BWMU of Yesteryears as Kingdom Helpers in Human Capacity Building Through Evangelism and Stewardship:

This era spans from 1919 to 1984. Many of our indigenous women served in various capacities as WMU Presidents, Directors, Field workers, Advisers and Leaders of departments. They were guided by the female Southern Baptist Convention Missionaries on Baptist Women matters. Mama Neal Young, served as the longest WMU officer from 1921 to

o 1961. Miss Ellen Yancey took over from her as the Executive Secretary from 1961 to 1984. As earlier indicated, the beginning of WMU work in Nigeria was very tough but much was achieved. These include :

Evangelism to villages under very poor conditions health hazards/ environmental issues and serious inadequate transportation system. The women trekked long distances for days to get to their destinations. Women were involved in prayers and building women to be self reliant and self sufficient by teaching them skills in the art of dyeing, reading and writing..

Many women were enlisted in the churches and were taught to become potential wives to pastors, teachers and civil rights servants. Girls were sent to "Iyawo School" at Oyo and others sponsored to the Teacher's College at Idi-Aba. Abeokuta. During this era, WMU gave financial assistance to churches, to the needy and encouraged personal Service, invited women to their fellowship, Association and camp meetings, organised Bible Study, contributed financially towards church planting and trained young people. It was during this period that Girl's and Lydia's Auxiliaries were started(G.A.1922 and Lydia 1952). These were involved in evangelism, giving and acting Bible stories. During this period, very few women started attending International Conferences which helped them to understand the plight of fellow women in other nations. They began to understand more about the vision of WMU of Nigeria.

BWMU of Nigeria Today as Kingdom Helpers in Human Capacity Building Through Evangelism and Stewardship:

This period spans through 1984 to this present time. It is divided into two Eras;

Mama Pastor Dr -Aduke Akinola Rev. Dr. Yemi Ladokun (1984- 2009):

-Rev Dr. Mrs Rachael Adepte Lateju's Era(2009 to Date).

Mama Pastor Dr. Mrs Aduke Akinola and Rev. Dr. Mrs Yemi Ladokun's Era(1984 -2009):

These two Executive Directors had earlier served in various capacities in WMU work as offices such as Directors in Young People's Organisations established for the purpose of Missions. They worked with some WMU Presidents such as Mrs Sayomi, Dns Mrs Agnes Onosode and Mrs Mary Akplaka . During this period the work of WMU expanded tremendously, especially in advancing the cause of Christ through Evangelism, education and stewardship. Human capacity building became more pronounced. Aggressive dissemination of information and the spread of the Gospel through programmes became more impacting. Yearly Evangelism plans by the Evangelism Committee headed by the Evangelism Chairman were spelt out for the women. Mission Fields established by the Global Mission Board of the NBC were allocated to Conferences who in turn visited, engaged in crusades, door to door Evangelism, meeting the needs of the churches and their missionaries such as donating food items, clothing, Bibles clothes, Motor bikes, musical instruments , money as well as building auditorium for worship.

During this era, precisely in 2003, the Writers' Workshop started at Camp Young, Ede. The vision was to prepare women to become authors and writers. Today, WMU literatures are being handled by our women. Skills acquired have helped some of them to be authors books, magazines and programmes in different spheres of life not only for WMU but for their personal upliftment. Some of these include: Enjoy WMU work, WMU Yearbook, Proclaim our quarterly Magazine for teaching women on interesting issues and the Young People's Organisations' Manuals. During this period also WMU became more involved in the rehabilitation of the disadvantaged, such as Commercial sex workers and in the area of Prison Ministry. For instance in Ogun Conference between 1989 and 1992 Miss Martins, a Southern American Baptist Missionary the residing in Abeokuta led some BWMU members of First Baptist Church, Ereko, Ijebu Ode to start a Prison Ministry. It is worthy to note that this yielded positive results because some of the prisoners accepted Jesus Christ as their Personal Lord and Saviour, genuinely repented, miraculously discharged and acquitted and now rehabilitated. Women were also taught how to make

soap, pomade tie and dye and given incentives during workshop and Retreats. Executive Women's Retreat started during this period. Women from different professions met yearly to discuss about issues pertaining to their nation and gave suggestions on how to resolve them. It enabled women to become more aware of their surroundings, more assertive and knowledgeable about life situations.

Finally during this era, more women became very proactive in attending International Conferences such Baptist World Alliance, Baptist Women Union of Africa and Women's Union of West Africa and featured in the activities such as evangelism, symposium, quiz competitions and giving. In 2002 and 2007 the WMU of Nigeria attended the BWUWA and BWUA in Ghana respectively.

Rev Dr. Mrs. Rachael Adepate Lateju's Era (2009- To Date) Mrs Mary Akplaka,

Dns Adebisi Olagbegi. were former National Presidents respectively who served in this Era but have rotated off. Dr. Mrs Josephine Onohwakpor is presently the National President serving along with the Executive Director Rev. Dr. Mrs. Rachael Adepate Lateju. This is an era of rapid development in human capacity building through Evangelism and Stewardship. The era is characterised by innovation, research, intensive and extensive programmes to promote the spread of the Gospel of Christ and capacity building for women, girls, children, men, the church and the society true Christian living, self sufficiency and self reliant lives. More work are being done in terms of door to door, market, village, personal, open air, neighbourhood, bus, bike, school and social media Evangelism and stewardship. Evangelism by kingdom helpers BWMU can now be done through Whatsapp, Instagrams, YouTube and online programmes..

Prayers are now being held more constantly with a larger coverage, online. These have helped to reshaped lives and the society. Baptist Women go to the schools to preach and give motivational talks and counselling on health, educational, cleanliness and tips for moral living to learners. Through these efforts many children and the school environment itself have been given new face-lifts due to interventions by our WMU. Some dilapidate

d school structures have been repaired by the government through the intervention of BWMU in some towns and villages.

In this era, the 34 Conferences were divided into 3 Zones: Eastern, Western and Northern for easy and speedy accessibility to our women. As a result, more women now attend programmes organised by BWMU because of proximity of venues. They are now very knowledgeable about WMU work. For instance in the just concluded 2024 Leadership and Annual Conference of Eastern Zone, one more than two thousand women attended! Attendance at Camp Meetings has also improved because the leaders train women to spread the gospel give skills acquisition training to enable them to be self reliant and self sufficient. Through these skills acquisition training, some of the women are now self employed and employers of labour.

BWMU now sponsors and rehabilitate the less-privileged girls, boys indigent student pastors for formal education while some are artisans. During Associational, Camp meetings and Retreats women are made to visit hospitals, orphanages, leper colonies and the elderly to spread the gospel and provide food, clothing, bibles, books, and funds to converts. For instance the BWMU of Ethiopia Delta Baptist Conference in (2024) organized a day camp for the elderly. They had funs, games, tea break and items were distributed to them.. In this dispensation, more women are now writing and our literatures have become more robust. The WMS Director assigns topics to selected women from various zones to write our Annual bi- annual and quarterly magazines and programmes such as the Seal, Proclaim, Mother's Day, Steward Ship and Service, Bible and Mission Study Programmes. The good thing about this is that women can freely express their opinions, interact and constructively make themselves clear about national, local and International issues bothering man and society. This is self assertiveness and the product of human capacity building by these Kingdom Helpers.

Moreover, the BWMU has expanded their horizon in human capacity building by organising workshops, Seminars and Executive, Hannah's, Rebecca's and Widow's and Pr

ayer Retreats. Here, Bible study, preaching, motivational talks by professionals are given and women and girls are trained, taught and counselled. Participants are equipped with skills on how to handle their life challenges. For instance during widow's retreat, lawyers are invited to talk on the rights of the widow and there are instances of women who were able to retrieve their husbands' properties from the greedy relatives. Such was the case of a woman in Providence Delta Baptist Conference. Women have been empowered with equipment such as sewing machine, hair dressing, catering tools, and fund for starting businesses. Today, more than the other eras of the BWMU, more attention is being paid to Bible Study, Discipleship training, evangelism, giving, Prayer and counselling. We have more of our women reading the Bible through annually and young people are engaging in Bible quiz competitions through the social media.

The BWMU in collaboration with the Global Mission Board of the NBC are into supporting local and International Mission Fields by planting and building new churches as well providing funds, paying missionaries and donating clothes, food items and musical equipment to these missions. For instance Anioma Delta Baptist, the defunct Delta Baptist and Ibadan Baptist Conferences have built Church Auditorium in Ashaka, (2016). Alisimie (2015), Isoko (2009) and Ibadan. BWMU have also built a Prayer ground at Eku (2018) in Ethiopie Delta Baptist Conference, another in Badagry in Lagos Baptist Conference and a central one at Camp Young Ede. The Prayer ministry cannot be undermined because through it many people have received their liberation. The National Prayer Chairman and her Committee plan and organise prayers at the national, Conference, Association and church levels. Today there is an Organisation known as the Daughters of Zion. During Convention, Conference Associational meetings as well as during Workshops, these soldiers of Christ are on ground, praying, interceding for people and doing deliverance when necessary. Our women are not left out during International Prayer Days like the Africa Women's Day of Prayer and Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer. So women are now very much abreast with the problems of people of other races and do join in praying

for and assisting them financially.

BWMU now belong to different Christian Bodies such as Christian Association of Nigeria, Christian Council of Churches, WOWCIN, All African Baptist Fellowship, Baptist World Alliance, Baptist Women's Union of Africa and Baptist Women's Union of West Africa. BWMU members have been to Hawaii (2010), South Africa (2015), Kenya, Togo, Ghana (2007), Liberia (2022) and Zambia (2019) to attend these International Conferences and their input as Kingdom Helpers cannot be overemphasized. Their knowledge of the world, their giving and donations have put NBC in the world map. This era has witnessed greater campaign awareness, stewardship Services, Missions and impacts on creativity, self reliance and sufficiency not only to their members but to men, women, and to the disadvantaged who are non-Baptist.

Conclusion:

The History and Work of Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria is creditably interesting and undoubtedly commendable. It extends beyond preaching the gospel. Lateju (2019) acknowledges that BWMU is a Helper to the Nigerian Baptist Convention because women as helpers in the homes and with their support and encouragement, have brought about Progress in our Convention. Human Capacity Building has been and is still the focus of these Kingdom Helpers despite national and Global challenges. According to Ayegboyin (1996) Patterson acknowledged the fact that women bore the brunt of suffering by making personal sacrifices in the interest of the growth of Baptist Churches. Thus, from this paper, it is seen that BWMU Work has gone beyond its initial vision. It has now taken the Leadership in building the people, the church, the Nigerian society and the Convention and other sister nations. According to Lateju (2019) BWMU is indeed a Pace-Setter, Promoter and a Pillar in the expansion of the Gospel in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. It is concluded that BWMU is a Kingdom Helper in Human Capacity Building through Evangelism and Stewardship.

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