

**PRISON MINISTRY RETREAT 2022**

**Address by Rt. Rev. Dennis Debukari Tong**

**(Anglican Diocese of Tamale)**

**THEME "REVIVE US O LORD AS IN THE TIME OF OLD"**

Gracious God, help us to be obedient to your command to love and serve you in all people. Make us conscious of your loving presences everywhere, and especially with those in prison. Comfort the prisoners in their loneliness and uphold their families during separation. Remember those who work in our system, that they may perform their duties in a spirit of fairness and patience. Bring to a closer relationship with our brothers and sisters who as prisoners and staff share with us the joy of your release from human bondage. Bless and protect all who serve in the Prison Ministry and enable them to fulfil their calling. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Let me take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this year's retreat for inviting me to give a talk. I am very grateful and appreciate this invitation.

The word retreat means to withdraw and reflect. It was usually used in the military circles especially during war. It has to do with the army withdrawing from the battle field in order to strategize and move. This gives the Commander time to study the plans of the enemy and plan to overcome them. It also means to move back or away especially from something dangerous, difficult, or disagreeable. So this morning we have withdrawn from other activities so that we can have time to look back at our ministry in the prison, to evaluate our work and to plan for the coming year. The Theme "Revive us O Lord as in the days of old" is very appropriate because we have faced challenges and difficulties in this ministry and therefore need to take time and reflect. The theme also seems to suggest that there has been something wrong with our ministry or we are not moving as fast as we should. To be revived means to be restored to life especially for those who have collapsed. In our case if our ministry is gone to sleep or is in a slumber, then it needs revival. Revival also means to restore, to return to the original. The theme for psalm 85 is "revive us again". Revive us as in the days of old shows that God has made our revival his core business and all we need to do is to come to him with humility. Please during your quiet time read psalm 85.

I will suggest we look at revival at three different levels.

1. The necessity of our own individual revival.
2. The revival of the prison ministry.

### 3. The revival of the inmates.

Our revival as individuals is very important to our ministry in the prisons. There is an adage which says that you cannot give what you don't have. We therefore must start with the revival as individuals. No one can revive him/herself. We therefore have to come to God as individuals and ask him to revive us.

The Psalmist cried to the Lord "You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth. You will bring me up again. Psalm 71:20. What this means is that we must start by reflecting on our own lives first as Christians. What are the challenges and difficulties which we face as Christians in our daily lives? When we do this we will be able to ask God to revive us, to re-energize us, so we can live our lives as Christians. Our calling first is to be the followers of Christ. We must first be Disciples of Christ, before we make others his disciples. If we miss this point, we will not be able to minister to others.

As a Ministry we need to be revived. Collectively we must come for the Lord to revive us. The challenges and difficulties we meet in our daily lives as we minister will definitely burn us out. Sometimes the doubts and fears that engulf us make us feel like giving up. We must come and seek the face the Lord. As Ministers of the Prison Ministry, we have the responsibility to help our brothers and sister to be revived. Here we help them to find their way back to the original plan God had for them before they got into trouble. The prisons are meant for reformation (correction) and not just for punishment, we have to help them understand this point. Our task is to help them reform and you know the word to reform has the same meaning as the word to restore. The revival of the ministry is important because until we are revived ourselves as ministers, we cannot expect any revival from the inmates. Here we need to examined ourselves first as individual members of the ministry and secondly collectively as a group.

In this case we need to ask ourselves some basic questions:

1. What is it that is making it impossible for us to achieve our goals?
2. What resources do we need in order to minister meaningfully in the Prison?
3. What have we failed to do?

We begin to reflect on the difficulties and challenges of the prison ministry. Here we should be thinking of both material and human. We need to evaluate our work to see whether we are making an impact on the lives of the inmates. Our theme also, suggests that we cannot revive ourselves, someone has to do it. In our case we are looking to God to revive us and for that to happen we must come to him. Revival also has to do with restoring.

In the book of Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” When we talk of restoration or revival, we must have in mind what God originally intended us to be. That is what we term “our calling” our calling into the prison ministry. What is it that God is calling us to? How have we fulfilled this special calling of ours? This morning as I have indicated already, we need to go back to our roots and search within ourselves what this calling means to us. The Prison Ministry takes its mandate from the gospel of Matthew chapter 25: 36; I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. To visit the prison, you visit Jesus, to minister to a prisoner is to minister to Christ. Each time we enter the prisons therefore, we should be ready to meet Christ in the people we serve. That is why we must serve them with joy and gladness. If we fail to meet Christ in them, then we have not fulfilled our mission. That is why our ministry should not just be about spirituality, but it should also serve their physical and social needs. It is good that we serve their spiritual needs but we should also be concerned about their social and physical needs.

Our service to the prisons should include their safety, health and salvation. We have a duty perform in helping and leading them to salvation in Christ. But how much have we done for their future, health and safety? May be it is time to begin to see our ministry in the prisons in a wider sense. As I said before we can go and minister and preach the gospel for their salvation, but that is not enough, although that is our primary goal. We need to begin to work on our secondary goal, which has to do with their physical and social needs. I am aware that at the beginning of the year we visit with food and other items, but what happens during the year.

What services do we offer to them?

How have we been useful to those who need lawyers to defend them in the courts? How have helped or supported those who have acquired skills in the prison to use their skills? How have we followed with keen interest those who have left the prison walls? Can the prison ministry be useful in this regard? My prayer this morning is that God who has called us and entrusted us with this ministry will equip and empower us to fulfill our calling. Amen.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ADDRESS**

BOLGA RETREAT- 2022

Psalms 85:6 (KJV)

" Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?"

☒ Banner song Asempa #319 "Jesus still lead on"

PCG Twi 280

1. Brief history of the Prison Ministry of Ghana

- the origins

- the guiding principles

- mission, vision

- membership (corporate, church, para-church)

- individuals-Rev. Prof. Seth Aryettey, Rev. Dr. Chris Hesse, Rev. Prof. AdukweiHesse, Mr. Sam Okudzeto, Rev. Fr. Prof. Ankra-Badu, Sam Badoo (JSC)

2. Medicals

- outreaches

- programmes

3. Half-way homes

- Akuse

- Zebilla

- Sekondi/Takoradi

4. Ex-inmate rehabilitation

- Halfway homes

- Inmate homes & other training programmes

- Follow-up

5. Donation of Bibles & hymn books

6. COVID-19 lessons

- use Information Technology (IT) for communication's
- work from home (how applicable to ministering in the prisons?)

#### APPENDIX E

- we (humans) are not in control in this world!

- know, seek, serve God
- Jesus is Lord; He is real!

7. Prayer

- primary role
- top-most importance
- institute prayer time for Prison Ministry of Ghana
- fasting!
- Revival!

8. Deviant inmates but good ex-inmates

9. Follow-up

- social welfare Department
- role of the church
- social media reports

10. Need for new, younger members

- vitality, strength
- don't carry ministry business alone
- advertise your work : go to Churches!
- reach out for more: those gifted interested, younger ones
- budget bigger! Our God is big! Your faith is key.
- orphan baby!!!

11. Constitutional review

- organizational structure
- Board of Trustees, Council, Executive Committee
- funding, dues, donations

#### APPENDIX E

- Powers, authority levels
- Partners: obligations, rights
- Regional/Branch committees
- chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer

#### 12. Ministering in the prisons

- Dos & Don'ts
- Covid-19 conditions: vaccination card, Prison Ministry of Ghana/Ghana Prisons Service ID card, nose mask, sanitizers, etc (permit letter conditions)
- preaching content- PCG Almanac
- communion
- teaching: basic literacy, Bible literacy
- reach out to churches!

#### 13. Major programme

- Christmas party
- Retreat 2023 (Abokobi)
- Theme

**GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

1. How can we revive the Prison Ministry in the Region?
2. What obstacles are there in our zeal to revive the ministry?

Group Discussions: Group 1

1. How can we revive the Prison Ministry in the Region?
  - a) Each volunteer should have personal prayer-life
  - b) Have monthly prayer meetings (corporate)
  - c) Each should study the scriptures (- under-pin prayer)
  - d) Create forum for educating ourselves
  - e) Let the word studied work in you before you minister to others to revive the Ministry
  - f) Have deeper love, passion for the inmates
  - g) Die (sacrifice) to self in order to serve the inmates
  - h) Spread the word of the need to commit to the ministry
  - i) Address transportation (cost) issues of volunteers
  - j) Make time to talk to church leadership about Prison Ministry
2. What obstacles are there in our zeal to revive the ministry?
  1. Poor prayer life
  2. Poor giving culture
  3. Lack of faith in God's ability to solve our problems
  4. Lack of patience on the part of officers
  5. Lack of co-operation from some prison officers
  6. Spiritual attack on ministers to the prisons

## Group 2

### 1. How can we revive the Prison Ministry in the Region?

- Need to increase membership in other churches
- Use personal contacts in spreading message of Prison Ministry
- Organize training workshops for ministers
- Have self-revival
- More advertisement about Prison Ministry
- Establish Regional Executive to organize affairs of Prison Ministry
- Regular meetings
- Mobilise funds
- Have regional letterhead
- Involve local council of churches
- Organise District Prison Ministry meetings

### 2. What obstacles are there in our zeal to revive the ministry?

- Need for teaching materials
- Agenda GHC1.00 per Christian per annum (donation to Prison Ministry of Ghana)
- Commitment of members
- Avoid denominationalism
- Paucity of knowledge about prisons
- Criticism about members' involvement in welfare of prisoners.