

## “The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’”

(Judges 6:14)

The angel of the Lord met the young Gideon. Like all the people, he was distressed because of the affliction that the Midianites had brought upon them for seven years. Secretly they had to bring in their harvest and hide it, so that the enemies could not seize it or destroy it. The ancestors had told them about the miracles of God when He led His people out of Egypt. Now they had settled in the land of promise - and were again harassed.

There are several examples that God calls younger instead of older, weaker instead of stronger, e. g. Gideon and not his brothers (Judges 6,11-16), David and not his seven older brothers (1. Sam. 16). God has different criteria than we do. He looks for the inner suitability instead of the social or family position. "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27ff.).

God uses the disadvantaged and the lowly to carry out his will through them. These usually have nothing to offer except their willingness. In the eyes of the world, they lack any qualification. To God, however, they are valuable instruments.

The name Gideon (גִּדְעוֹן) derives from the word root גָּדַע (gada', "to cut something off"). In this name is expressed the mission that God had given him. That Gideon did not lack courage and faithfulness, he had proved. He had destroyed the altar of Baal as well as the statue of Asherah and erected in its place an altar dedicated to the God of Israel. He was so hated for this that they wanted to kill him (see Judges 6:27-30).

Before Gideon goes into battle against the Midianites, God builds in another difficulty. Israel has only the small number of 22,000 fighters to oppose the superiority of the enemies. But God considers even this number too large, because in case of victory they could attribute it to their bravery. So that both, Gideon and the fighters, do not develop any self-glory, He reduces their number to three hundred (Judges 7). The uncountable number of enemies was defeated because God Himself intervened.

When we are assured of God's presence and help, our shortcomings become meaningless. For it is not we who achieve the goal by using our strength, but it depends on God's grace alone. This takes the pressure off us. The only thing we must bring is faith and trust! Even in the face of overwhelming problems, we may confidently wait for God's help.

Hans-Joachim Heil



God had heard the plea of His children. Now He was about to answer it. The Lord did not choose a strong fighter for this, but a young man who was loyal to Him. He called him to free the people from the yoke of the enemies.

God does not accept his objections that he was much too young and that his family was the least important in the tribe of Manasseh. The Lord counters the quite understandable reasons that spoke against his suitability from Gideon's point of view by saying that He Himself would be with him so that the mission would succeed.

Gideon describes himself as small, young, low (צַעִיר - "zair"). He considers himself unsuitable because he lacks the experience and strength. The others would not trust him either. But God's assessment is different; with Him there is an "election of the small". The same word is found in Micah 5:1: "And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the thousands of Judah, out of you he will choose for me. From you he will come forth for me to be ruler over Israel...". Not the capital Jerusalem, but an inconspicuous place is designated as the birthplace of Jesus.

# Do I keep my marriage vows?

An acquaintance said to me some time ago, "If I don't keep my marriage vows, I do damage to my marriage.... If I deny the needs of the other, if I refuse respect, if I humiliate or belittle the other?"



These words made me think. And perhaps as you read, you will conclude: my partner - and I - don't we sometimes behave like that?

- We don't get taken for what we are worth.
- Respect? We miss that.
- My needs? Are they always perceived by my partner? I doubt it.
- Are we controlled by the other, and do we occasionally feel humiliated by a remark - or at least put in the shade or compared with others?

Surely everyone finds themselves in this text. In doing so, it would be necessary to clarify whether our lack of self-worth does not mean that some things are interpreted into the other.

We should ask ourselves these questions:

- Do I show respect and esteem for my spouse?
- When have I told him that I value his opinion?
- Do I always have the last word and make the decisions?
- Are the decisions we make aligned with him as well?

- Am I - do I feel - better at education, superior in strength, wiser in planning, better at raising children?

There's no need to prove that I behave this way. Let's rather ask ourselves: What feeling must the other person have when I behave like this?

And even if it should be so, does my spouse understand my language and my actions so well that he doesn't interpret it negatively? We realize how much interaction with each other plays a role in speaking and acting correctly - and in being understood as one wants to be understood.

We should ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do I know my partner's needs?
- Do I know about his fears?
- Do I know the worries that move him? The hurts that others have caused him?
- Do I know his inner struggles that he must fight?

I encourage you to ask him about this. And, if possible, try to respond. We are people living in the time after Pentecost. God gave his Holy Spirit. People praised God in many languages. Amazed, the listeners found that they could understand what was proclaimed. Only the mockers were closed to the language. They simply dismissed the apostles' enthusiasm about God as a sign of the effects of alcohol. For those who do not really listen cannot understand, just as those who do not want to understand. Although a wide variety of languages were spoken, people could understand them and felt addressed. When we make

God the center of our thinking and feeling, we begin to understand one another. For He is the best interpreter.

Strangely, we read something else in the Bible. People in Babel wanted to build themselves a tower that would reach up to heaven. By doing so, they hoped not to be dispersed and to make a name for themselves. But a great confusion of languages happened, so that one no longer understood the other - unlike the apostles at Pentecost who praised God, and the multilingualism led to understanding.

What an example for us! Where we let God into our relationships, understanding can grow, however different our "language of origin" may be as men and women, as people from different family backgrounds, from foreign cultures. How much hope Pentecost gives us. May our marriage and our relationships be made whole by the love of God that he wants to pour into our hearts (Romans 5:8).

## To think about

The wisdom of the Babylonians was not enough to build the tower. The simplicity of the apostles, some of whom were fishermen, did not prevent God from providing them with all they needed to serve others.

## To remember

Understanding begins when I allow God to speak into my life. I can make a new beginning when I surrender my resignation to Him.

Ruth Heil

## News from Africa

### Burkina Faso

We carry out activities in the capital, but also through FLM cells in the provinces, as in Koupela, where we spent a few days with 121 internally displaced people (IDP) and discussed practical issues: soil-less cultivation, the manufacture and use of biofertilizers and natural pesticides, the manufacture of Neem oil, and we talked

about the delicate situation of women in IDP camps. In Banfora, we taught on the theme of "Marital and family harmony". We also led debates, for example on the sources of conflict in the home, analyzing the main sources of conflict and "typical" reactions. We conclude these debates by suggesting ways of resolving conflicts.

And we had the opportunity to run a conference on financial management in the family for the staff of the national office of the NGO Compassion International. Of course, activities such as meetings, counseling, etc. continue throughout the year.

Benjamin and Louise Bombiri

# News from Africa

## Cameroon



FLM was stricken by the death of our secretary Ndjiddah Christian in February, married with 5 minor children. It was a hard blow for us, given the place he occupied within FLM.

Lately, apart from activities for couples, we have been concentrating on young people and their preparation for marriage. Their concerns are complex: what is the difference between friendship, engagement, and flirt? What is the ideal age to get married? If you can't find your soul mate, what should you do?

The question of celibacy, the place of parents in the choice of a spouse, disappointment in love... these are some of the questions that young people ask themselves. Young women also have questions relating to African traditions, Western culture and what the Bible says about our traditions.

Experience shows that many young people approach marriage with a certain amount of apprehension. Generally, they fear that the person they commit to for life will change once they are married or they are afraid that their love will gradually fade over the years. These questions also lead us to address the subject of choosing a spouse.

To make our activities more visible in the churches, we plan to create an FLM cell in the churches where our members belong.

Andre Maya

## Central African Republic



At the end of the year, we organized a retreat for couples to remotivate them after the trauma of the pandemic. We found ourselves in a secluded place and agreed to put everything aside to recharge our batteries. It was a moment of blessing and union. We left strengthened and encouraged. We have opened an FLM cell

## Congo-Kinshasa

The FLM group is mourning, Suzanne Nyamuke, the wife of bishop Idore Nyamuke (president of FLM) passed away in November 2022.

The group is active in the surroundings of the capital Kinshasa and in the provinces, although traveling is not always without danger. Thus, in Tshikapa (Kasai, 978km from Kinshasa) a seminar took place with 53 couples on the theme "a strong couple for a strong family, a strong church and a strong nation". Many of the participants were pastors, and certain teachings were reserved for them. Another training took

place in Kikwit (550 km from the capital) on the theme "Let us practice the good works that God has prepared for us in our families". The purpose of this seminar was to show pastors, deacons, etc. the importance they must give to their relationships with their family members in order to be a good witness.

An awareness session for young people against pregnancies in schools was also



held by Jean Bosco using a film on this theme. The young people had a lot of questions. Idore Nyamuke, Jean Bosco

## Burundi

"Conflict resolution in couples" was the theme addressed by FLM vice-president Cornalie Manirampa in Bujumbura, a meeting also attended by FLM president Jean Mpitarusuma. She insisted on the fact that in a couple, 2 very different people meet and confront their opinions. Their points of contention can lead to serious conflict if the couple doesn't react. Conflicts are part of life, and you must know how to deal with them. Not talking, not listening, lecturing, for example, are all harmful to the relationship and don't resolve conflicts. You must attack the conflict and not the partner, speak with love, let the other person express himself, listen and ask for forgiveness.

As for Aurélie, she brought together women working at the bank to develop 2 themes: "What is the purpose of the family?" and "What are a woman's responsibilities?" For some, it was the first time they had attended such a meeting.

Jean Mpitarusuma,  
Cornalie Manirampa

at FATEB for student pastors and their wives. Couples normally meet there every Saturday afternoon, except during holidays.

We planned another couples training and asked each FLM couple to invite a new couple who did not know FLM.

Brigitte Yabeke, Williams Moloby



# News from Africa

## Ghana



Upon request of FLM International the leadership of FLM Ghana agreed to send Rev. Kweku and Mrs. Cynthia Essibrey-Annan to East Africa in order to help launch FLM Tanzania and FLM Malawi as well as conducting seminars for advanced counseling in Uganda. Rev. Kweku and Mrs. Cynthia are supervising the new FLM ministries thus contributing the lots of experience they gained during several decades.

We had meetings on Zoom, for example prayer meetings led by Rev. Bernard Lartey, committing ourselves and our program for 2023 into His hands, and trainings on the theme "Sexuality, family and spirituality" and "Intimacy in marriage" (Prof. Stephen Adei). We will also outreach to other parts of the

country (Takoradi, Tarkwa, Sunyani, Akim-Oda and Kumasi). Our intention is to establish branches in these places. For this we have introduced the vision and mission of FLM to some persons, serving as our contact persons. Their task is to share the FLM concept with other couples who feel called to counsel and organize them into a core group for an initial premarital counseling. Two of such core groups have been formed in Sunyani and Kumasi. The Kumasi group has 9 couples, and the training was organized beginning September. We keep on having invitations from churches and religious groups to share topics on family life with them. Individuals come for both premarital and marital counseling from our members. Some of the counsees are referred by

those who have attended our seminars or participated in teaching service in a church.

This was a youth who was referred to Rev. Essibrey-Annan from a police station. The mother of the youth went to the police to report her son for constantly stealing from her. However, the officer the mother met at the charge office had been taught counseling before by us and therefore referred the young man to us. During the first counseling session it came out that he was addicted to gambling. He also stopped secondary school. The young man was not a Christian, so he was first led to Christ and started attending church. Within 6 weeks of being taken through Biblical counseling, he was helped to come out of the gambling addiction, went back to school and entered university this year.



Learning from the challenge this young man went through, FLM Ghana is designing a syllabus that will be used for the training of some selected youth in peer counseling to help other youth. The training will focus more on prevention.

Kweku Essibrey-Annan, Bernard Lartey,  
Edmund Asante-Ansong

## Guinea



During the seminars we often study the theme "Solving problems in the couple", so there are no couples with-

out problems and without challenges to overcome. And even if the problems are small, it is better to treat them before

they become serious. By facing the difficulties of daily life together, we learn to know the true nature of the other. We must apply the verses of Galatians 6:1-2 in our life and our relationship and help each other progress. It's the program of a lifetime! During the group discussions, we asked the couples a very personal question: what did your partner say or do that displeased or hurt you? Could you talk about it with him? Has anything changed? We have also advised a few couples individually.

Kakea Guemou

# News from Africa

## Ivory Coast



A regional seminar took place in Bouaké, organized at the N'Dakro church on the theme of time management in couples. The speaker emphasized the need to use the time wisely because the time God gives us on

this earth is short (Ps. 90:10) and there is a time for everything under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Another seminar took place in Korhogo. The couples studied the subject "Marriage, a place of fulfillment". To have a fulfilling marital relationship, we also studied the themes of growth in marriage, time management and conflict management.

Koffi Djeko

## Liberia



We are organizing seminars and conferences during the year in different areas. The participants are always interested in learning more about the husband-wife relationship and the family. That's why we are often talking about the topic "The responsibilities of husband and wife". The first responsibility of the couple is to make the home their priority. Cou-

ples are supposed to work hard to earn money to take care of their families (1 Thess. 4:11-12) ... and Christian couples are also working at church, serving on various committees. But we should not sacrifice our marriage and family because of work or church activities. Going to work early and coming home late when spouse and children are already

asleep will have negative repercussions on yourself and the family: you will get tired and worn out; you will lose communication with your spouse and children, and you will become a stranger in your own home.

We conclude the topic often with the following tit bits:

- Work is important, but don't be workaholic. To be too much success-oriented leads to emptiness.
- Be sensitive to each other's needs, and don't take each other for granted.
- Spend quality time with the children. Be honest and patient with them. Love and discipline them, when needed.
- Be wise in your relations with the parents and in-laws. Remember, you leave and cleave, but you don't abandon them. Don't forget them.

William Kettor



### In memory

On July 5, Kumba Kettor was called to the heavenly home after a long suffering. With her husband, Rev. William Kettor, she has been involved in marriage and family work in Liberia for decades. Without her encouragement, Rev. Kettor must now continue the journey alone.

He does this knowing that his wife is with Jesus, and that he must continue to care for the needy as they did together before.

## Madagascar



The cells spread across the country resumed monthly meetings, and seminars were organized. We had training on the theme of engagements. Another basic seminar was for marriage counselors to gain knowledge to help others. We

asked them to commit to participating in the whole seminar which lasted a few days. We have planned refresher training again this year for those who wish. The coordinating couple will also visit the different cells to encourage and edify them before the end of the year.

Manoa and Noro



# News from Africa

## Malawi



A new FLM group was formed in January 2023 following a basic seminar held in Kasungu (129 km from the capital). The speakers were Kweku and Cynthia Essibrey-Annan (Ghana) and Joshua and Doreen Mukisa (Uganda). Ten couples and one single person participated.

The “classic” FLM themes covered were new to them. It was a great discovery. Indeed, divorces, remarriages and blended families are commonplace in certain regions. FLM values like “leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh” (Genesis 2:24-25) must be taught so that couples

have a good foundation for their marital relationship.

Following this seminar, an FLM branch was born with pastor Halfwel Gumbo as leader.

The atmosphere was very friendly. The participants asked many questions and shared their experiences. They want to progress and wish more seminars in the future.

Halfwel Gumbo



## Mali



“My family in the service of the Lord, a privilege or a duty?” was the theme

of the training that 35 couples followed.

Members of a Christian family are neither superheroes nor angels. They face the same problems as the others, but unlike others, they want to please God by obeying His commandments. The notion of family is defined broadly in the Bible. There is the family as the commu-

nity of those living under one roof, then the family in the broad sense (a clan or several forming a tribe) - and the family in the figurative sense which represents God's people (Romans 9:4 ).

As a Christian, serving God is not an option. From the beginning of marriage, it is important to recognize that as a couple and family we serve the Lord. Together we worship the Lord, together we read His Word, and together we work for Him. What a great program!

Dinguebireye Poudiougou

## Rwanda

We have local FLM groups in Kidaho, Musanze, Rurindo and Kabatwa. In addition to marriage seminars, we offer conferences for young adults because before they get married, we will teach them the good way of living in harmony in the family. Those who are engaged to be married need help in the matter of having a family founded on God's Word.

We had seminars at different locations. The one held at Base Sector has been a good occasion for couples to share and discuss about the topic relating to the family. Without the family, no church, no society could exist. That's why we need strong families based on married men and women who love each other, who know the needs of each other, who

have a good relationship. A second seminar was organized to speak about the difficulties in building a good relationship in marriage like:

- Not willing or being able to change some things that can destroy a marriage and family.
- Untruthful spouses
- Not being satisfied
- Lies destroy the relationship etc.

Our plan is to teach more counselors, to promote good relationship within the families through dialogue, good health (for that we have trained members to cultivate

vegetables at their homes) etc. We will also encourage the families to be a model for others and mobilize the youth in fighting Aids and promote physical care of those living with Aids.

Fabien Semivumbi, Salathiel Nsengiyumwa



# News from Africa

## Sierra Leone



We had a seminar at Kono in January 2023 with the topic “Being best friend with your spouse” (Ephesians 5:25). The district coordinator is one of the military chaplains, therefore 8 couples attending the seminar were military personnel. He told us that this seminar was a blessing, because the wives of the military personnel, most of the women, were suffering from violence. They have realised that their marriages were in great shamble. They didn’t know before their responsibilities and distinct roles as husbands and wives to get a happy marriage. After the seminar the staff of FLM seated with couples with serious conflicts to find

ways to resolve their marital issues.

We had also a marriage seminar in Bo in May about “The advantages of building up counselors for Biblical marriage counseling” (Ephesians 5:18 and 6:10-18) –

the third training in that town. At our arrival we had a good time of fellowship and prayer with the district coordinator. The turnout was very good, and testimonies from couples and would-be couples from the past seminar were impressive and encouraging, which helped to build our dedication to the ministry and to see that marriages are being restored.

We started to deal with few counseling topics so that they will be able to handle any complicated issues between couples. The topic “Scripture, culture, tradition and your marriage” covered the definition of culture, a product of tradition.

We were keen on how to address this topic because the seminar was done in the province where people cleave on their culture. But we were able to let them know that the Bible is above all culture and that there are cultural practices which are ethical and don’t have adverse effect. “Principle and stages in counseling” was another topic among the six we studied with the couples in Bo City. It was very educative as there were lots of questions especially on evaluation of the couples since some of them do pretend that they have no problems. The facilitator says to evaluate them he gave them a task to do together to evaluate their communication skills.



We will have another marriage seminar in Makeni in October.

Hamid Kamara

## Tanzania

We had a meeting at Muleba. It has been a great blessing to have 68 delegates, including 25 couples among them, attending this training on the theme “How to maintain a happy marriage” (Proverbs 30:19).

Almost every marriage starts out as huge celebration, each couple is full of hope and dreams for the future marital life. But the road to a happy marriage is far from easy. Several factors contribute to failure in maintaining a happy marriage such as:

- Allowing bitterness and resentment to build in our hearts and relationship.

- Failing to keep communication lines open.

- Lack of forgiveness and God’s love for the spouse.

We had group discussions which sparked debate in both men and women. Some issues raised like:

- Men spent much time in production activities, in agriculture, fishing etc. and have no time for affection for their wives and care for the family.

- Some women hide money, and often

cut off money. So the principle “it is our money” should be emphasized.

Time was limited to deal with all the questions the participants had. We could only deal with 20 questions which were resolved through discussion or others got solution by means of counseling. This marriage seminar was a non-accommodation seminar, as we had not the financial means for a residential seminar.

Peter Dalmás





## News from Africa

### Togo

We have some seminars and conferences in the last few months. My wife Marguerite teaches about 40 young people every last Sunday of the month about premarital relationships and the criteria for choosing a spouse.

A talk on "Do I make my wife/husband happy?" was well attended. We also offered a seminar on "An exemplary married life" based on Titus 2:1-5 and another seminar on "Sexually content married couples... what are their secrets?". This

seminar was held in 2 parts to have more time in explaining what was said and for sharing.

We are grateful that we always can help couples live a better life together.

Charles and Marguerite Amedjikpo

### Uganda



FLM-Uganda has activities ranging from seminars in different cells, training workshops, denominational leaders gathering and family based projects.

The counselors training was before reaching out to Tanzania and Malawi. With Rev. Kweku and Cynthia Essibrey-Annan (experienced leaders of FLM Ghana) and the office in Germany, we decided to hold trainings in Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi on January 2023. Rev. Kweku and Cynthia Essibrey-Annan arrived beginning January to train first the FLM group in Uganda.

Because the trainings were residential,



it enabled the trainees to bond, share experiences and interact. It had an interdenominational nature. Among the denominations represented in the training include Pentecostals, Anglican, Catholics and seventh-day Adventists. This interdenominational representation increases the scope of impact by way of many families reached and helped.

The counselors training took place on January in a quiet, isolated place and yet not far from the city center of Kampala. We were 12 couples all together, coming from different denominations. The counselors training was a success.

Then Rev. Kweku, his wife Cynthia and Joshua and Doreen Mukisa traveled to Tanzania for a counselors training, and thereafter they went to Malawi for a basic seminar.

They had time to rest in Lilongwe the capital of Malawi, and later the two couples flew back to Uganda in preparation for two additional training semi-

nars in two locations, namely Nakifuma and Seeta/Mukono beginning February 2023.

Both seminars were a success measuring from the trainees' participation and responses. Each location had 50 couples in attendance.

People have the desire to learn, apply and impart to others. This forms a serious foundation for good counselors. Some participants carry mixture of Biblical values and cultural beliefs, making it harder to change behavior.

Serious work has been done in the FLM cells especially in Nakifuma, Mukono, Lugazi and Masaka. The seminars focus on being "model families" whose light and example affect the neighbors. The testimonies of the members are encouraging and prove changed lives and families. Attending and observing events in the Lugazi cell confirm new romantic passion and live connection.

FLM Uganda family projects has taken a low profile so far though in ways easily manageable by the families. Examples include backyard vegetable gardens, chickens, and goats. The goal is to make sure that possibly every family of FLM members has a little business from which it can get income at least seasonally. Perhaps we can eventually be able to network towards a common enterprise for effective marketing.

Joshua and Doreen Mukisa

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