

March 23, 2023

Dear Regional Coordinators,

Thank you for welcoming me so kindly, and congratulations on the progress you are making in solidifying the FAITH in Ghana Alliance and strengthening your regional and local efforts. I wanted to share some observations that may be helpful.

Many blessings to you and all of the many people you are motivating into action,

Gordon

-You are successfully reorganizing the FAITH in Ghana Alliance. The energy and activity at the regional level is impressive, and the next step of bringing the vision and work of multi-faith organizing to local communities has begun. It was exciting to see people begin to schedule team meeting in Gambaga and other communities, so that they take the initiative in **organizing their own communities**.

-The regional and local growth makes the FAITH in Ghana Alliance more solid, AND addresses the most important development challenges facing Ghana. I heard from many people the importance of decentralizing resources and initiative to local actors for Ghana to move forward. And that to be effective in combatting division and extremism, multi-faith understanding needs to reach into local communities. Your reorganization of the FAITH in Ghana Alliance to promote the agency and priorities of ordinary people is **modeling what Ghana needs to do as a country**.

-Taking time at the start of meetings and trainings for people to **share their stories** really worked. Zan used a simple question, what was the most important experience, or person, or even mistake you made, that influenced how you see the world, who you are as a person? People shared in pairs and then we debriefed to hear a few stories and, most importantly, discuss how sharing stories with another person built empathy and trust to be able to work together.

-I gained a better appreciation that the **differences people are bridging** when they share their stories are not only religious, but also related to gender roles, tribal identity and history, regional, education levels, rural-urban, and class. Part of what seems exciting and magnetic for people is the chance to connect across difference, and this may be even stronger at the local community level.

-Working in **local languages** will be an important dimension of creating inclusive local teams and organizations. You will also need to figure out translation for national meetings in order to include local leaders.

-Following our August 2022 three-day leadership training in Tamale, each of the regional teams took initiative to choose one or more community, do community entry activities, and then undertake a significant listening process. In hindsight, **we should have been clearer at the training on the importance of bringing together a multi-faith team of local residents** who could participate in that listening process and carry forward the work. In the absence of that step, some regional teams are now needing to circle back to build local teams.

-The best **sequence** seems to be to identify a community, meet with the local Chief and other key religious leaders to get their support and identify local residents from each religious body who could be part of a local coordinating team. It makes sense to have some of these people recommended by the Chief and some by religious leaders, so there is a good mix. And then the role of the Regional Alliance is to provide training and coaching, and walk with people as they do listening, identify issues, and build a Local Faith Alliance in their community.

-Local teams will need **different support** to build Alliances in their communities and go through the organizing process to identify and resolve issues. Stay close to the local teams to make sure they have every religious body represented and are clear about what they are doing. But make sure local people are owning their process. As one example, 8 people came to the training for the North-East and Upper-East Regions. They had not met before. In the last session they resolved to meeting next Saturday at 4pm (perhaps they will be the first local team to meet), and identified a young man, Inusa, to coordinate that meeting. When we checked back with Inusa to see if he arrived home safely, he said, yes, and he also called each of the other people who came from Gambaga to make sure they arrived safely. This was a good sign that he is taking the coordinating role seriously. As the regional coordinator, Fr. John is going to check back with Inusa before the meeting to help him think through the agenda and then after the meeting to see how it went.

-We talked about whether the Gambaga team could include a woman from the witch's camp. The local team will have to figure that out, but in principle, it is important for the local FAITH Alliances to include **ordinary people** who might not otherwise be seen as typical participants in meetings, young people, poor people, people in any kind of stigmatized role. Using local language will also help.

-I heard a story of a community where a Christian NGO had drilled a well. When Muslims came to draw water, they were told the well was for Christians. The story illustrated not only the need to teach tolerance, but also why it is important for a multi-faith team in the community to **consult everyone**, rather than have a project delivered to the community.

-I learned how important it is to **animate and resource Districts** to promote development. I had a 1:1 with a former District Chief Executive who is a lay leader in the Sunyani Diocese. He explained that District Assemblies have resources from the 5% allocation of government revenue, far too small, and local taxes and fees, and begin the process of deciding budget priorities at the beginning of the year and finalize it by November or December. He said the District Assemblies should welcome the listening and organizing that the FAITH in Ghana Alliance is doing, because they are committed to consulting local residents, but don't always have the processes or resources to do so. He explained the pressures he was under to reward party members with contracts, jobs and projects. He said that he would be better able to resist that pressure if he could point to having been elected by voters.

-Throughout all of the trainings and meetings, I heard **common problems and issues**, including the lack of water during the dry season, hunger issues because of the land being worn out, the need for investment in health clinics, poor parents not being able to send their children to school due to extra fees demanded and costs of uniforms and books. Many of these issues are regional and national. In the absence of a District or Regional plan for investing in water management to provide clean water to every family, there are small NGO or private projects to drill wells.

-As you think through how the FAITH in Ghana Alliance will engage in the 2024 national elections, it seems like you have an opportunity to continue the important work you've done to make sure the parties abide by the election results, and do not promote vigilantism and violence, and to also press the candidates to focus on **issues that are important to ordinary people**, like development, decentralization, direct election of local officials and making education accessible to poor children.

-One step the regional alliances can take is to hold **embedding trainings** on multi-faith organizing for priests and other religious leaders in their region.

-Faith in Action, through Pastor John Rutsindintwarane, Fr. Innocent Rugaragu, Rev. Juard Barnes, Rev. Dr. Cassandra Gould and I are happy to keep walking with you in your inspiring faith-filled work to transform Ghana for ordinary people. We wish you blessings on your work and wish you a Ramadan Mubarak.