

Leadership in the African Diaspora
A Project of The Institute for African Diasporan Culture (TIDAC)
in collaboration with the Center for World Christianity
at New York Theological Seminary

Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.
~ Akan proverb

If you think you are a leader but no one is following you, you are just taking a walk.
~ Malawian proverb

Africans have long been a people on the move. From the days of the first migrations nearly 125,000 years ago when human beings walked out of East Africa to populate the rest of the world, to the most recent experience of immigrants arriving in New York and London last month, people from Africa have been mobile and migrating. As they have moved, they also have mixed, creating a rich diversity of cross-cultural and inter-cultural experiences, but at the same time creating new challenges as people are forced to learn to live with new and ever-changing identities and realities.

John Pobee once wrote that “*homo africanus* is *homo radicaliter religiosus*, i.e., an African is a radically religious being.”¹ African theologians from St. Augustine on have noted that religion is what binds people to God, and one would add, to each other.²

As African peoples have moved and mixed through the centuries, African religions have moved and mixed with them, creating greater and richer religious complexity. Such mixing has not diminished the religious dimension of African experience, however. Religion remains as important a factor in binding African peoples together in community in the contemporary global African diaspora as in the traditional African village.

Migration has brought people of African descent into new social and cultural contexts. Religious models of leadership, especially ones adept at mixing, have not always kept pace with the changes. Strengthening leadership is essential to strengthening community. Building new leaders for tomorrow is equally essential to building new communities for tomorrow. Leadership begins with wisdom, integrity and respect. It entails a commitment to learning and listening, an ability

¹ John S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, Christian Council of Ghana, 1991), 11.

² St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, Cap. LV, n. iii

to build bridges and make connections, and a willingness to embrace the past even as it takes the risk of facing a future full of change.

Strengthening religious leaders of today and raising up new leaders for tomorrow is an imperative for people who are part of the African diaspora. Furthermore we cannot do this work in isolation. A Nigerian proverb says, “In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and foolish build dams.” Leaders from all African religious communities must learn to work together to build those bridges rather than dams.

Addressing these needs, The Institute for African Diasporan Culture (TIDAC) with institutional support from the Center for World Christianity at New York Theological Seminary (CWC) will undertake the following:

Leadership training workshops

- During the spring of 2014, TIDAC will sponsor and host four one-day training workshops for African religious leadership in the New York metropolitan region.
- Workshops will be held in various locations throughout the New York metropolitan community.
- The cost of the workshops will be minimal, designed to cover any costs for space and food for each day. TIDAC and NYTS will provide the training faculty for the events.
- Publicity will be handled through direct invitations to a number of identified religious leaders, mailings from TIDAC and NYTS, ads in community newspapers serving the African diasporan community in the New York area, radio announcements, and information placed on both TIDAC and NYTS websites
- The workshops will be designed for up to twenty participants each, and will cover foundational and advanced issues in religious leadership training.
- The workshops will be intentionally ecumenical and multi-faith, with participants from Christian, Muslim, and Traditional African religious communities both from Africa and the African diaspora.

- The workshops will be designed to provide ample opportunities for exploring both traditional and emerging models of leadership in Africa and the African diaspora. They will also provide an opportunity for participants to listen and learn from one another
- Members of TIDAC along with others from the African diasporan will serve as facilitators of these workshops, which will be held in churches, mosques, and community centers throughout the greater New York metropolitan region.
- Members of TIDAC as well as other consultants invited to attend will also be learning and listening to discern what leadership needs exist that are not being adequately addressed by existing programs for religious educational leadership and training, including programs in theological education in the New York region.
- At the conclusion TIDAC will produce a study guide and training program that will be shared with participants, and refined for continued use.
- All participants will receive a Certificate of Completion by TIDAC and the CWC.
- Expected outcomes of the training workshops will include 50-75 participants undergoing leadership training; a new training guide for African diasporan religious leaders; the publication of findings in a newsletter online.
- Following the conclusion of the spring workshops, TIDAC will in conversation with its various partners and participants assess the need for continuing work, as well as options for carrying the workshops into other regions of the USA or other parts of the world

Annual Study Trips

- TIDAC will continue to lead an annual study trip to West Africa for students of theological education and others from NYTS and other theological schools in North America.

- Faculty from NYTS will continue to participate in these trips, using them as well to build further networks with churches, other religious communities, and theological educational training centers in West Africa

On-Going Consultation

- TIDAC and NYTS will seek out opportunities to provide on-going consultation with local, regional and national religious leadership in the New York area, elsewhere in the USA, and in other locations, that are intended to provide resources for strengthening religious life and expanding religious opportunities for peoples from the wider African diaspora.
- Such consultations will be with judicatories of various Christian denominations, interfaith or multifaith organizations, independent congregations or other religious communities, institutions of government and public life, and more.
- Such consultation may or may not entail consulting fees. TIDAC and NYTS do not intend to charge for these services, but will welcome contributions.
- At least one book and several additional publications or papers will be published from these efforts.
- NYTS through the CWC as well as the Center for the Study and Practice of Urban Religion (C-SPUR) will seek to document the findings of this work as well as part of the ongoing effort to increase scholarship pertaining to transnationalization, diasporan studies, and religious leadership in multifaith contexts

*If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.
~ African proverb*